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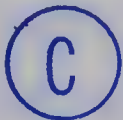
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CLASS AND PARLIAMENTARY OPINION:
THE DEBATES ON THE REPEAL OF THE COMBINATION ACTS,
1824-1825

by



David John Moss

A THESIS
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled CLASS AND PARLIAMENTARY OPINION: THE DEBATES ON THE REPEAL OF THE COMBINATION ACTS, 1824-1825. Submitted by DAVID JOHN MOSS in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

This enquiry attempts to determine the extent to which Parliamentary opinion was influenced by class interest during the debate upon the Repeal of the Combination Acts. As a corollary to this discussion, it is hoped that the validity of one hypothesis made by E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, may be tested. This hypothesis suggests that as a result of the growth of an insurgent working class the propertied rulers of England gained a sense of identity and formed a class of masters.

The debates of the 1820's, both inside and outside Parliament, indicate the gradual development of a spirit of conciliation and concession among the landed and manufacturing interests. The excessively repressive legislation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had failed to erase or even seriously lessen the threat of revolution. As the aristocracy knew from experience, distress might provoke a further challenge to the ruling elite at any moment. Concomitant with this intransigent refusal of the worker to starve quietly, a second phenomenon which involved the socio-cultural relationships in society, began to influence the affairs of Britain. However, for a few years this new factor, class, remained relatively unobtrusive.

In the third decade, the Tory government introduced measures designed to alter the prevailing principles of Free Trade. With the appearance of these innovations in concert with the manifest liberal spirit evinced by the ruling elite,

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Francis Place became convinced that 1824 was an auspicious year. This gentleman, a tailor who had led the sustained campaign to secure the repeal of the Combination Laws, canvassed vigorously for support. The Administration concluded that the measure proposed fitted neatly into their overall policy. The alliance was compacted and the requisite act of repeal encountered no difficulty.

The violent reaction of the workers was far greater than that expected. The oligarchy found their 'divine' right to rule in jeopardy. In common with the manufacturing interest, they expected an immediate attack upon property. The force of numbers and the addition of knowledge to the lower orders had created a threat to privilege. In self defence, the landed and manufacturing interests reacted as a single class defending its prerogatives of 'property'. A committee was appointed and an Act subsequently passed which severely curtailed the freedom of the workers to combine. Parliament, nevertheless, had not abandoned any professed economic principles; the evidence with which its committees were presented in 1824 and again in 1825 had been closely related. Yet, an Act structured to give the greatest possible licence to the landed gentry became law; a licence which extended the hand of common interest to the masters in the manufacturing towns. From the speeches of Members of Parliament, from the minutes of evidence of their Committees and from the hysterical prophecies of their associates outside the Legislature, it must be concluded that Parliamentary opinion had indeed been shaped by the interests of class in 1825.

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CHAPTER I

CLASS, PARLIAMENT AND COMBINATION

The Singers have sung and the Builders have builded,
The Painters have fashioned their tales of delight,
For what and for whom hath the World's book been gilded,
When all is for these but the blackness of night.

William Morris - The Message of the
March Wind.

Mr. Clive Jenkins¹ was jubilant on September 30th, 1966. His Union had finally succeeded in wrenching the initiative from the employers, to the extent that he could now threaten "to sue every employer who breaks a wages contract."² This singular statement made scarcely a ripple in the union-orientated world of the twentieth century. Yet it expressed an idea that had been many years developing; one which may be dated with precision from the repeal of the Combination Acts but almost certainly existed long before that. Possibly, Jenkins himself, was unaware of the full significance of his

¹General Secretary of the Association of Supervisory Staffs and Technicians.

²The Times (London), September 30, 1966.

remarks, but he would not have remained in ignorance if John Gast³, or one of the myriad early union leaders, had been present. They would have known that the words indicate an attitude of mind, an activity which had evolved and grown from a conscious articulated awareness of class; an awareness that had been one result of a vigorous surge of change in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, decades which have recently been called the era of the Dual Revolution.⁴ A political upheaval, the French Revolution, combined and altered the course of history, through its indication that change, sweeping, dramatic, man-made change, was possible.

It was in Britain that the first industrial society was launched. Individual, atomistic competition operating through the open market, where supply and demand would determine price and wages, was the revolutionary ideal. The new society was, of course, no sudden manifestation and represented many decades of slower preconditioning change, wherein capitalistic agriculture left only fragments of the old communal agrarian pattern and a vigorous, highly successful, world-wide commerce had flourished. Capital had been built up in the eighteenth century, partly through sudden massive demands, first for textiles later for iron and numerous other industries, all

³ Secretary of the General Trade Union of 1826.

⁴ E. J. Hobsbawn, Age of Revolution 1789-1848 (London: 1962).

of which necessitated technological innovation.⁵ The early capitalists who applied the inventions to industry and supplied the demands, were of an interesting caste:

... uneducated, of course habits, sensual in their enjoyments, partaking of the rude revelry of their dependents, overwhelmed by success, but, yet, paradoxical as it may seem, industrious men, and active and far-sighted tradesmen.⁶

The human material upon whom they depended for labour was recruited during the greatest re-organization of the physical order of the communities which had ever taken place in England. In the old agrarian societies, the production of the necessities of subsistence had been the first interest and chief occupation of the people, but with the new, vast superstructure of manufacturing wealth and population which became imposed upon England, a new unit arose, the ugly, sprawling, industrial town.⁷ In these towns, the voice of protest, which it had

⁵In mining one great mechanical invention affected the whole scope of the industry, Newcomen's pumping-engine (B. Williams, The Whig Supremacy 1714-1760 [2nd Ed., Oxford: 1960], 111). In the textile industry a succession of inventions, for example Hargreaves, spinning jenny (1765), Arkwright's water-frame (1769), and Crompton's 'mule' (1779), generally increased production (J. Steven Watson, The Reign of George III 1766-1815 [Oxford: 1960]).

⁶P. Gaskell, The Manufacturing Population of England, (1833), 55; quoted by J. L. and B. Hammond, The Town Labourer 1760-1832 (London: 1920), 8.

⁷In 1774 Manchester had a population of 41,000; in 1801, 75,000; in 1821, 135,000. In 1760 Oldham numbered some 300-400 souls; in 1801, 12,000; 1821, 22,000. Bradford was "a little town with grass-grown streets in 1794" (Hammond, 5, n.4), in 1821 there was a population of 26,000. The population of Leeds grew from 53,000 in 1801 to 123,000 in 1831. These figures are taken from B. R. Mitchell (ed.), Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge: 1962), 24-27.

been still possible to raise in the middle of the century, became drowned in the clangour of a burgeoning economy. For many, the ills attendant upon industrialism may be traced from this disruption of life:

... much of the bane and many of the blessings incidental to our condition - the growth of an opulent commercial and a numerous, restless and intelligent class; sudden alternations of prosperity and depression - of internal quiet and violent political excitement; extremes of opulence and destitution; the increase of crime; conflicting claims of capital and industry; the spread of an imperfect knowledge that agitates and unsettles the old without having defined the new foundations; clashing and independent opinions on most public questions, with other anomalies peculiar to our existing but changeful social existence.⁸

The agglomerates of humanity were moulded to fit the new society by men who felt they did not possess the traditional obligations, who owed their prosperity neither to birth nor education. Their labourers, segregated and repressed, received few of the benefits which accrued to the country as a whole.

... the isolation of the individual - this narrow-minded egotism is everywhere the fundamental principle of modern society. But nowhere is this selfish egotism so blatantly evident as in the frantic bustle of the great city.⁹

The first effect of this process was the depersonalization of human relations, one facet of which produced the 'Church and King' mobs and the degrading appellation 'lower orders.'¹⁰

⁸ J. Wade, History and Political Philosophy of the Middle and Working Classes (Edinburgh: 1842), 1.

⁹ F. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, trans. W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (Oxford: 1958), 31.

¹⁰ H. Hunt, Memoirs of Henry Hunt (3 vols., London: 1820), vol. 1, 141.

In the eighteenth century, society was conceived as being hierarchial, in terms of a pyramid; thus, the common people, it was thought, were merely finding their true rank and dignity -- at the base. Gradually, however, the continued isolation turned the lower orders inwards, into themselves, so that a collective self-consciousness developed, aware of its own identity and to which, in time, could be applied the label class. The acceleration of this process culminated in "everything from their shops, their chapels and their amusements ...[being] turned into a battleground of class".¹¹

This battle was fought against a background of ignorance and deprivation which, it can safely be said, has rarely been equalled:

I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey; but never, under the most despotic infidel governments, did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return to the very heart of a christian country.¹²

Yet it has long been held that against the pity of change one must set the gains; in this instance, a theoretical rise in the standard of living. In his challenge to this proposition, E. J. Hobsbawn emphatically denies that the position of the artisan improved in any way. R. M. Hartwell has led the rebuttal and called his adversary to task in a series of

¹¹E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: 1966), 830.

¹²Lord Byron, Speech in the House of Lords, quoted by P. Arnot, The Miners (London: 1951), 29.

articles.¹³ But, irrespective of the changing economic position of the operatives or the bitter arguments of the economists, few would deny that the conditions of life for the mass of urban workers were appalling. There were many symptoms of the adversity with which these people were faced. Often their bitter hatred was directed against the purveyors of food, but there were also many incidents which were merely in the image of the riots which had been part of the British scene for hundreds of years. The state of servitude prior to the industrial revolution was often hard, and the Lords and Squires scarcely more gentle than the new egotistical employers. The plight of the town dwellers was, then, in no way peculiar to industrialism with the exception of the added discipline of the machine. What is remarkable is that their relative condition did not improve markedly, or even closely "keep pace with the progress of the time."¹⁴ It could not be unexpected therefore, that such a concentration of misery began to awaken the communal awareness, and caused working people to become observers of and writers about society.

The process described received its greatest stimulation from the French Revolution.¹⁵ It became the historic

¹³E. J. Hobsbawn and R. M. Hartwell, "The Standard of Living During the Industrial Revolution", Economic History Review, Second Series, XVI (No. 1, 1963), 119-146.

¹⁴The Westminster Review, IV pt. II (July-December, 1826), 263.

¹⁵The second half of the 'Dual Revolution'.

arsenal for all future British agitation, as it was for most groups who sought to bring some change to Europe in the Nineteenth Century. The warm regard with which the British aristocracy had welcomed the revolution of 1789 did not last beyond the rapid radicalization of the Gallic upheaval which took it farther than the Whig principles of 1688. The revolution had not long remained a simple attempt to limit centralized, despotic power by establishing civil and religious liberties, rather it appeared to release anarchic forces which would prove disruptive to society and property. The ranks of disappointed Englishmen grew in 1793, disappointment turned to fear, fear to reaction, and reaction killed, among other things, the movement towards reform in the House of Commons. Among the workers, the liberation of revolutionary ideals inflamed their apprehensions and imbued hatred for their taskmasters. Although the London Corresponding Society and its sister groups were small in number, their activities became alarming to the hereditary elite so that they were forcibly disbanded and outlawed in 1799.¹⁶ Moderate opinion was swayed by the newspapers, which were largely government supported¹⁷, and thus alienated from the urban masses. Parliamentary agitators aggravated the elements of aggression which

¹⁶Watson, 362.

¹⁷Hunt speaks of a Whig and Tory press "for there was no other at that time". Hunt, vol. I, 22. Note also, Chapter III, "Government Subsidies (England)" in A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press 1780-1850 (London: 1949).

lay beneath the surface by pitting one group of operatives against another. But most frightening of all to the reactionary was the achievement of discipline, the organized meetings and orderly demonstrations which were new and indicated a time, rapidly approaching, when the masses would be a force which could not be cajoled from its purpose. The poorer classes had been passive, now they were "dreaded as a Leviathan that was fast learning its strength."¹⁸ Prime Minister Pitt was aware of and fearful of this power; he manifested this fear, in one form, by abolishing the old habits of quartering soldiers, billeting the army in various parts of the country to act as a police force instead.¹⁹ The minds of the ruling elite had been transformed by the French Revolution; the lives of the working men convulsed by the Industrial Revolution and the dichotomization of the nation had begun.

The term that eventually became common to describe the divisions of society was 'class'. It is a word that must be clearly understood. Burke used it in 1791 as a means of indicating that there had been a breakdown in the old structure of society. Francis Place vigorously objected to its use in any context,²⁰ largely because he felt it tended to destroy the

¹⁸Hammond, p. 94.

¹⁹Ibid., 120.

²⁰G. Wallas, The Life of Francis Place (London: 1918), 95. Although this book is presented in the form of a biography, it is in reality a collection of Place's papers, and therefore invaluable to this thesis as a primary source. In the footnotes for the quotations taken from this book I will merely use the page numbering system and omit the manuscript and folio numbers of the original Place collection.

old social fluidity which Adam Smith had defined as the "natural effort of every individual to better his own conditions."²¹ Understood historically, however, class is a changing concept, dependent upon relationships between men; relationships which themselves cannot remain fixed or stable. It may be interpreted as part of the structure of society; or, again, it may be used to show a set of highly complex relationships that actually evolve over a span of time. Some have argued that class cannot exist at any given moment in history, an enquiry merely showing a multitude of individuals having a multitude of experience. If class is viewed in this light it becomes an unreal theoretical construct imposed upon the evidence. Thompson notes that there seems to be two extant arguments -- one is that class is a precise almost mathematically computable thing, and the other virtually denies its existence.²² In order that a pattern of behaviour or social change over a period of time may be found, such a term as class is essential. Thompson prefers to see class as "a social and cultural formation, arising from processes that can only be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable historical period."²³ There is a problem, however, in that the historian must be sure that the class consciousness is an awareness on the part of the

²¹ A. Smith, The Wealth of Nations, ed. E. Cannon (London: 1920), Book IV, Chapter 9, 638.

²² Thompson, 10.

²³ Ibid., 4.

participants in the class relationship, that class exists and not an imposition from outside. Often there seems to be a 'cultural lag' wherein the participants are unaware of their social relationships. Class consciousness must be a contemporary self awareness and not an awareness of class by the historian.²⁴

The ruling elite in the late eighteenth century cannot, in truth, be called a cohesive body. This thesis hopes to show that it gained real self-awareness as a group only in conjunction with that of the working class, as Thompson suggests because certain antagonisms were resolved (or faded into relative insignificance), in the face of an insurgent working class.²⁵ The phrase 'middle class' antedates both as an expression of conscious pride rather than exhortation. As early as 1785 new organizations were being created; for example a General Chamber of Manufacturers, to cater to a specific group's needs:

...they are now persuaded that the prosperity of the Manufactures of this Kingdom, and, of course, that of the Kingdom itself, will be promoted by the formation of a general bond of union, whereby the influence and experience of the whole being collected at one common centre, they will be better enabled to effect any useful purposes for the general benefit.²⁶

²⁴D. Marshall, English People in the Eighteenth Century (New York: 1956), and R. W. White, Waterloo - Peterloo (New York: 1951), both discuss this point in great detail.

²⁵Thompson, 11.

²⁶"Sketch of a Plan for a General Chamber of Manufacturers of Great Britain" (1785), quoted by A. Briggs, "The Language of Class in Early Nineteenth Century England", Essays in Labour History, ed. A. Briggs and J. Saville (New York: 1960), 52.

Such developments meant a rapid mobilization of a new economic interest which rapidly increased in numbers and whose public claims were increasingly advocated. The Westminster Review, a middle class journal first published in 1824, looked back with pride: "the value of the middle classes of the country, their growing numbers and importance are acknowledged by all. These classes have long been spoken of, and not grudgingly by their superiors themselves, as the glory of England, as that which has given to us our eminence among the nations; as that portion of the people to whom everything that is good among us may with certainty be traced."²⁷ The Monthly Magazine, twenty-eight years earlier, had been equally certain of the great virtue of this class.²⁸ No less a person than James Mill in his Essay on Government included a similar eulogy.²⁹ The importance of London, and specifically Westminster, depended according to the Westminster Review, upon the "aggregation of persons of the middle rank."³⁰ The middle class had thus a recognized niche in the society of the late eighteenth century, a name that businessmen would gladly accept.

Thompson believes that the collective self consciousness of the working classes was, "indeed the great spiritual gain of the industrial revolution".³¹ Yet the implication suggested

²⁷ Westminster Review, IV, pt. II (July-December, 1826) 269.

²⁸ The Monthly Magazine (1798), Vol. V, preface A.

²⁹ J. Mill, An Essay on Government, ed. E. Barker (Cambridge: 1937), 71-72.

³⁰ Westminster Review, IV, pt. II (July-December, 1826), 270.

³¹ Thompson, 830.

is surely inadequate as an explanation of this phenomenon. The implied coincidence of industrialization and the working class awareness ignores the historical background of the English lower orders. It overlooks the fact that working class leadership in the formative years came largely from the artisans and weavers who were tradesmen in occupations that had long flourished before industrialization. Another of the more important factors must be the response to the growth of the class to which the previous paragraph was devoted. The working class press, such as it was, tended to use the term 'middle class' in a pejorative sense.³² The ways of the working man were idealized in order that he might be contrasted with the affectation and artificiality of the aristocrat, and with the selfish greed of the emergent middle order. In their predilection to believe in their birthright, the workers were encouraged successively by a number of writers. The popularization of Paine's Rights of Man was a work, in part, designed to alienate the middle classes who had so trustingly agreed with Adam Smith:

Though the interests of the labourer is strictly connected with that of society, he is incapable either of comprehending that interest, or of understanding the connection with his own...his voice, little heard and less regarded, except upon some particular occasions, when his clamour is animated, set on, and supported by his employers, not for his, but for their particular purposes.³³

³²This trend reached its peak in The Poor Man's Guardian and the newspapers of Henry Hetherington. J. H. Rose, "The Unstamped Press", English Historical Review, XII(October, 1897), 718-719.

³³Smith, Book 1, Chapter IX.

However, Paine's example encouraged others to attempt to express their own thoughts on the ills, and to prescribe remedies for the sickness, of society. The success of this drive to divorce the working class completely from the remainder of the populace by the operative leaders themselves, can best be appreciated by reference to some lines written by James Morrison in 1834 when he rejoiced, "Orphans we are and bastards of Society".³⁴ There is little sadness or regret expressed in these words, they were a battlecry rather than a lament.

The third and from some points of view the most important, group of this era composed the ruling oligarchy. Basically it was a loosely knit association of power cliques who sought to rule. The pre-revolutionary reform movement could be led by Whigs and aristocrats supported by the middle class entrepreneur and intellectual, but they were as fully imbued with the philosophy of Locke as those to whom they were opposed. Reform was a gentleman's affair. Some gentlemen, of course, believed in discipline uncompensated by reform and unqualified by concession, and stood firmly upon the principle that this was, in truth, the truest kindness to the lower orders;³⁵ had not Paley written that there was scarcely any respect in which the poor were not more fortunate than rich?³⁶

³⁴Quoted by Thompson, 830.

³⁵Sidmouth based his policy upon such a principle when he was Home Secretary 1812-1821.

³⁶Rev. W. Paley, Reasons for Contentment addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public (1793), quoted by Hammond, 232.

The dual revolution had frightened the oligarchy, some to favour concession, others to stricter methods but all acted as if a state of war existed between the classes as if they were different races.³⁷ The close identification of the revolutionaries in France with the lower orders who infested the cities of England was the result of a lack of perception by zealots who refused to look below the surface of human action. Their apprehension posited the propagation of "horrid ideas" as the only end of the turmoil which threatened to engulf them.³⁸ In Nightmare Abbey, the reactionary Mr. Flosky wails:

How can we be cheerful when we are surrounded
by a reading public, that is growing toowise for its
betters.³⁹

The most obvious manifestation of the growing anxiety and reaction to the spread of ideas occurred in the approach to education which the upper orders had so recently endorsed for their inferiors. Early in the eighteenth century, the general mode of education followed the centuries old practice of allowing the parish priest sole custody of those who could afford to pay a few pennies for the privilege; a system interspersed with a smattering of charity schools, often run on the whim of a humanitarian. Some systematization had occurred with the organization of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. By 1723, this body had opened 1,329

³⁷ Hammond, 80.

³⁸ Westminster Review, IV, pt. II, (July-December, 1826), 251.

³⁹ T. L. Peacock, Nightmare Abbey, quoted by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, History of Trade Unionism (London: 1920), 66.

schools.⁴⁰ Generally, the schools were run by a local committee who were merely advised by the national society. As a result, it was only in the larger cities, London and Bristol for example, that the schools were efficient. The Society had hoped to establish social discipline among the poor and to "condition the children for their primary duty in life as hewers of wood and drawers of water;"⁴¹ they were not particularly successful. The Society declined after 1723, religious difference drastically reducing the number of members. With the growth of Dissent, particularly Methodism, on the one hand, and the Evangelical accent upon duty to one's inferiors on the other, the Sunday school became more important as a source of education for the poor. At first, the rise in the numbers of the reading public had merely produced an increased sale of chap books, and stamped and unstamped almanacs. However, in the 1790's, the London Corresponding Society, in conjunction with other like organizations began to spread serious literature including The Rights of Man. Far less radical but equally important, after his return from America, was William Cobbett. His pricking of the oligarchial balloon provoked the same appellation that had been earlier given to Thomas Paine, 'Devil Incarnate'. The articles and monographs of the new radical press were avidly read by the agricultural

⁴⁰Williams, 141-142.

⁴¹M. G. Jones, The Charity School Movement (London: 1938), 5.

labourer and urban artisan. Copies were passed from hand to hand and read aloud by those who had some learning to those that had none. The ruling cabal, fearing a Jacobin rebellion, were, thus, forced to return to the education of the poor with a renewed sense of purpose; Lord Eldon warned Francis Place against

... the march of intellect ... a tune to which one day or other a hundred thousand tall fellows with clubs and pikes will march against Whitehall.⁴²

The zealots, Hannah More, Cobbett's bishop in petticoats⁴³ and Johanna Southcote, two women upon whom was poured so much obloquy, assured their Bishops that they

... allow no writing for the Poor ... and steer the middle way between the scylla of brutal ignorance and the charybdis of a literary education, the one cruel and the other preposterous.⁴⁴

George III, in one of his more lucid moments, simply expressed the pious wish that all children should learn to read the Bible. Patrick Colquhoun, a well-known and influential writer said in his pamphlet upon the subject:

... the minds of the poor should not be elevated above their station, and the schemes for an extensive diffusion of knowledge were utopian, injurious and absurd.⁴⁵

⁴²"Lord Eldon to Francis Place", quoted by R. K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader (London: 1955), 13.

⁴³Cobbett's Political Register, XLII, 20th April 1822, 4. The title of Cobbett's journal varies but, for clarity, all references to it will follow the form of this footnote. Between 1802 and 1803, the journal was called Cobbett's Annual Register; from 1817 to August 21, 1819 it was known as Cobbett's Weekly Political Register; and from 1821-1828 as Cobbett's Weekly Register. Publication ceased between April 5 to July 5, 1817, and again May 29 to August 14, 1819.

⁴⁴W. Roberts, Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Hannah More (1835), quoted by R. K. Webb, 15.

⁴⁵P. Colquhoun, "A New and Appropriate System of Education for the Labouring People", quoted by R. K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader 1790-1848 (London: 1955), 14.

Mrs. Sarah Trimmer was one of those who became concerned over the growing ability of the poor to read. Her answer was to produce the Family Magazine; a firm supporter of the establishment she attempted to reach the servants and cottagers through instructive tales which clearly delineated their place. This seemingly inconsequential work attracted sufficient attention to warrant the praise of Evangelical clergymen and the denunciation of Cobbett. The Religious Tract Society tried to provide similar spiritual fare. Its greatest sales, ironically, were among the upper classes, who carefully supplied their servants with the latest issue; visitors and philanthropists rarely gave charity in the form of food without tucking away a tract in a spot where it was sure to be found.⁴⁶ The most famous series, and the most ludicrous, was written by Hunt's 'buxom dame', Hannah More. Village Politics became a fad of the times; allegedly, it reported a conversation between a rural philosopher, often a farm labourer, and an unthinking radical, usually an artisan or small shopkeeper. The former caricature was invariably the victor. The contrived, often laboured, humour, allied with the identification of dissipation with radicalism and the idea of leaving politics to one's betters, did not endear the tracts to the working class; but, with its sister publications, it found a ready and enthusiastic audience among the aristocrats.⁴⁷

⁴⁶R. K. Webb, 26.

⁴⁷Ibid., 25.

The self-conscious awareness of identity flowered swiftly after the French terror among those who ruled England. They realised the need for collective action in fields other than education, and they possessed the privilege, up to that time but little encroached upon, of setting that realization into execution. They had in their hands the many instruments of noise, "the means of filling the ears of the nation so constantly with the din of their own opinion, as almost to exclude the hearing of any other".⁴⁸ Yet, this was of minor importance, compared to the instrument of government which they possessed, and the acquired dexterity with which they had learnt to wield it.

II

The unreformed House of Commons, the House of Lords and the King, ideally represented three separate powers which governed the kingdom. Each, theoretically, checked and balanced the other, but by the late eighteenth century the greatest power had devolved increasingly to the House of Commons. This power derived in part from its representative power, but more specifically from its control of financial measures.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Westminster Review, IV, pt II, (July-December, 1826), 251.

⁴⁹ For further discussion of this point, see E. N. Williams, The Eighteenth Century Constitution (Cambridge: 1960) B. Kemp, King and Commons 1660-1832 (London: 1957); and A. and E. G. Porritt, The Unreformed House of Commons (2 vols. Cambridge: 1909).

The choosing of the representative for the Commons was very different and separate from that of the ministers, the hustings were a world apart from the closet. It must be remembered that general elections did not coincide with changes of government, and the electorate, such as it was, did not choose governments or programs, but based their choice upon local and personal issues. Left to itself, the system would have resulted in a House of independent members, one that would have been virtually unmanageable. The 'oil in the machinery', however, assured the election of a number of members sufficient to facilitate the passage of the Bills of the Ministers. The influence exerted depended largely upon the efficiency of the First Lord of the Treasury, and the organization of a web of intrigue, an activity, which had become a continuous process. The members who might support the government did so for a variety of reasons. Among the most common was the hope of 'favour'; a place, pension or a government contract for either the member himself, a friend or a relation. There were many attempts by those outside the closet to restrict the ability of the King's servants to pursue such a course of action. However, it was, not until after the 1832 Reform Act that the 'opposition' achieved any degree of success and, throughout the eighteenth century, there were always between one and two hundred appointees in the House.⁵⁰ A similar reason for supporting the Government lay in the election itself. A seat in Parliament was a valu-

⁵⁰Kemp, 95-100.

able asset, a member's friends or relatives could receive lucrative sinecures, and, of course, there were numerous opportunities for self improvement. The assignment of a safe government seat or financial support, demanded the assurance that when the time came to vote the new member would honour his commitments, rarely was the First Lord of the Treasury disappointed. Patronage also played a significant role in the construction of the First Lord's web. Many private seats were made available to government candidates by men who were, in the words of Lord John Russell, 'caught by the bait of vanity'. The direct influence of the King and his ability to obtain a majority in support of his own policy was, of course, never great; and his Ministers only won elections because the King's influence was supplemented by the much greater influence of magnates, usually Peers and in the borough constituencies. At times, as much as twenty-five per cent of the Members in the Commons were the younger sons of Peers.⁵¹ Thus, dependent upon temporary working alliances between groups of Peers, the Commons fear of the House of Lords constantly vacillated between reluctant co-operation and violent attacks upon the whole structure, Dunning's famous resolution of the 1780's being one dramatic highlight.⁵²

⁵¹Kemp, 92.

⁵²On the 6th April, 1780, Dunning moved "that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished: Parliamentary Register, XVII (April 6, 1780), 91.

Strangely, many of the more striking successes were perpetrated by the Ministers themselves in the interests of efficiency and economy.⁵³ The bribery of electors was especially frowned upon by the more liberal leaders of the House, an election often became the signal for the more ugly aspect of the nation's character to appear. A partisan press, free beer and a liberal sprinkling of money easily produced the riotous actions of the mobs for which the eighteenth century is justly famous.⁵⁴

The Commons once elected, was not necessarily filled with unrepentant time servers that the mode of election would seem to predetermine. Often, it was difficult to control, albeit within hard and fixed House rules. There were no parties in the sense of a regular national organization which supported certain policies. Some called themselves Whig and others Tory, but in the main they were more bound by ties of friendship, interest or similarity of attitude towards one leader. They conceived political office to be a mandate to deal with problems as they arose and in accordance with their and not their constituents interests. In general, the label Tory gradually became attached to those who supported King and country, Whig to those who supported reform. Nevertheless, the demarcation between the two was faint and movement from one group to another unhampered. The Whigs accepted the existing

⁵³For example, the Treasury's loss of revenue patronage was more effective in reducing government influence over borough elections than Crewe's Act of 1782 which disqualified revenue officers from voting.

⁵⁴"John Clay to Newcastle", 31 December, 1753, quoted by E. Williams, 165-166.

form of the Constitution as freely as did the Tories. Compromise between fact and theory constituted their avowed object, radicalism was emphatically rejected in favour of making the best of realities. The constitution was for the Whigs, a mysterious, awe-inspiring blend of three great principles, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, and its virtue depended on a contrived maintenance of a balance between those three contending powers. It was in this mixture, rather than balance, of power which ensured the continued grasp of the upper class upon the means of government. The reports of debates in both Houses clearly express these attitudes which are naturally allied to the dominance of a particular group in society; thus, disagreements arise from arguments of form not essence, of philology not philosophy:

... we are for authority as well as for freedom
wealth and rank, and the veneration which belongs
to old institutions, without which no government has
ever had stability or respect, as well as for that
vigilance of popular control . . . without which none
could be protected from abuse.⁵⁵

III

The beginning of the nineteenth century did not appear to be in any way different to the century that had just passed. The upper class Englishmen enjoyed, as the Hammonds noted one hundred years later, the freest society in Europe.⁵⁶

⁵⁵F. Jeffrey, Essays II (1826), 153; quoted by A. Aspinall Lord Brougham and the Whig Party (Manchester: 1937), 48.

⁵⁶Hammond, 60.

They were uncluttered by restrictive laws, enjoying virtual immunity from all but treason. Trial by jury and dependent judges had been the guarantee and security of the freeborn of any rank, but with the rapidly growing veneration of the most material of the English trilogy, property, the law was constantly turned to the protection of this accoutrement and as such, both judges and magistrates, with few exceptions, began to see themselves as the policemen of the existing order. The courts followed the lead of government and were fast becoming an instrument of 'class' supremacy. The vagrancy laws superseded the old concepts of liberty; men and women of the working class who seemed 'radical' were swiftly incarcerated. The middle order had been won to the side of the aristocrat by the excesses of the French revolution and by their own love of property; a fact quickly noted by the worker:

Farmers, Bakers, Butchers likewise
An example there is put before your eyes
It is the pride of your heart to see the poor
starving,
You that have plenty do not care a farthing.⁵⁷

By 1799, the movement for reform was dead and the societies of London and the provinces scattered. The harsh laws of Pitt had deprived the poor of their right to express their indignation,⁵⁸ in the next few years he attempted to

⁵⁷ A doggerel of 1800 quoted by Hammond, 290.

⁵⁸ The Seditious Meetings Act prohibited meetings or lectures except under licence from a local magistrate. The Treasonable Practices Act redefined the law of treason; those who devised evil against the King, helped invaders, sought to coerce Parliament, or attacked the Constitution were made liable to seven years transportation.

deprive them of the right to control their own destinies. The basis for this wanton assault on the liberties of the people - the intense anxiety to strengthen the walls which protected the aristocratic power and excluded the people - has been discussed. The remark of an aristocratic employer emphasizes the extent of this dread:

... I want a man that will work and take his glass of ale! I'll think for him.⁵⁹

Laws were necessary to enforce this dogma. Thomas Hodgskin, later to become one of the philosophers whose ideas the Trade Union Movement promoted enthusiastically, believed that there was not a single law that was worth an honest man's struggle.⁶⁰ He saw that the Law and its axioms were an expression of the power of the elite who ruled at any specific moment in History. In an age of materialism, he knew that whereas theft was reprehensible, the product of theft was sacred. The journeymen had of course not yet reached this degree of anarchistic thought; indeed, many of their early unions had been organized to enforce the law, for example the Statutes governing the apprenticeship system.⁶¹ Slow, piecemeal legislation, severe in some trades, lenient in others, had eroded the power of the workers to combine for any purpose, even in their attempts to enforce laws originally designed to restrain them. Disputes

⁵⁹Detroitier cited the remark while giving evidence First Report of Factory Commissioners (1833), 18, quoted by Hammond, 59.

⁶⁰"T. Hodgskin to Francis Place", 2nd September 1819; quoted by E. Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin, trans. A.J.P. Taylor (London: 1956), 48.

⁶¹S. and B. Webb, 66.

between the worker and the master, when they did occur, were more differences of opinion rather than deliberate conflict. However, their betters generally refused to accept them as such:

... the people of the same trade seldom meet together even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.⁶²

Solidarity among the manual workers of different trades did not appear suddenly. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, disputes between employer and employee tended to dwell upon wages, either in attempts to resist reduction or to agitate for an increase in earnings. The industrial revolution altered the framework of this dialogue by creating conditions which increased the opportunities for common action, and, at the same time, making the new employers more vulnerable through fixed machinery and the need for large investments of capital. The masters compensated by using two distinct methods. One was private Bill legislation; petitions were sent to Parliament by interested parties to penalize a variety of offences -- stealing materials, destroying work and combination in general. The second method, which later became extended in its use, was to ask for summary proceedings before magistrates as an alternative to prosecution at local Sessions or Assizes. This practice involved less delay and

⁶²Smith, Book 1, Chapter X, 128.

expense than prosecutions under common law.⁶³ Nevertheless, trade societies flourished, the Manchester spinners had a Book of Rules in 1794 which contained a stringent but mystic code.⁶⁴ Combinations fast became, in the dramatic language of the Hammonds, one rung in "the ladder from a prison" for the workingmen, but to their employers it was a step "whereby the proletariat might one day take the State by storm."⁶⁵ Of this latter contention the workers were contemptuous, the burdens under which they laboured were a sufficient guarantee, they thought, for their servitude:

... the interposition of the magistrates; the superior steadiness of the masters, and the necessity which the greater part of the workmen are under of submitting for the sake of present subsistence, were handicaps to concerted action.⁶⁶

But, amid the celebrations of the last year of the old century and the first of the new, and despite those safeguards, new penalties were concocted and old hatreds were strengthened in Parliament.

M. Dorothy George rightly rejects the Hammonds rhetoric that.

... these two Acts [1799, 1800] ... remain the most unqualified surrender of the State to the discretion of class in the history of England ... a powerful class is often apt to say to itself 'L'Etat, c'est moi' ... but few Governments have said so emphatically

⁶³ Sir W. Holdsworth, A History of English Law (16 vols. London: 1966), Vol. XI, 475-485.

⁶⁴ G.D.H. Cole, Attempts at General Union (London: 1953) 6.

⁶⁵ Hammond, 251.

⁶⁶ Smith, Book I, Chapter VIII, 67.

as the government of Pitt and Liverpool, "L'Etat, c'est lui".⁶⁷

These remarks were certainly ridiculous in the light of the Legislation and the debates of the period. As a stirring indictment it is sadly lacking in historical perspective. The 1799/1800 legislation introduced, as Dorothy George clearly saw, no new principles and created no new offence, compared to its predecessors it did not even appear to be severe.⁶⁸ The first of the two Acts had been introduced by Pitt and was hurried through the House in 1799. Under the Act, any workman might be committed by a single magistrate for combination, the magistrate could conceivably be one of his employers. Similarly, the attendance at a meeting, contribution to or attempt to secure a contribution for, a combination was an offence. Support for the Act had been quite general. Wilberforce had suggested the Bill in its general form after the millwrights had petitioned for such a Bill in their own trade:

These combinations he regarded as a disease in our society and for which he thought the remedy should be general, so as not only to cure the complaint of the present, but to preclude their return. He thought that the worthy mover of this subject deserved praise for what he was doing.⁶⁹

A few liberals, notably Sheridan and Lord Holland, and the heroes of the artisans, such as Tarleton and Hobhouse, had

⁶⁷Hammond, 115.

⁶⁸M. D. George, "The Working of the Combination Acts", Economic History Review, VI (April, 1936), 172.

⁶⁹Parliamentary Register, VIII (April 9, 1799), 323.

expressed disgust. In The Times Sheridan wrote, "This foul and oppressive Act ought to be repealed."⁷⁰ The torrent of petitions which flooded into Parliament after the passage of the 1799 Act, plus the efforts of the rare disgusted opponents among the members, sufficiently impressed the Commons with the need for modification. The worst features, as far as the workers were concerned, were improved; in part, this must be attributed to the struggle of Gascoyne and Sheridan who had helped in the drafting of the new Bill. Two magistrates were substituted for one and a magistrate who was a master in the trade under scrutiny, could not sit upon the bench to try offences.⁷¹ Arbitration was, at best, accepted as a principle. The basic injunction, however, against combination was not ameliorated. This second Act, Mrs. George notes, was called, "a dead letter upon those Trades upon whom it was intended to have an effect, namely, the shoemakers, printers, paper makers, ship builders, tailors, etc."⁷² She also reports that there was a considerable confusion in the minds of witnesses before the Select Committee of 1824 on Artisans and Machinery, as to what the Combination Acts actually were. Both statements are correct as far as they go; however, in the same pamphlet from which the first quotation was taken, the author, George White, continues that the Act was:

⁷⁰The Times, July 1, 1799.

⁷¹For the Clauses of the two Acts see the text to the Repealing Act (5 Geo., IV, c. 95) in which they are enumerated.

⁷²Quoted by George, 175.

... a tremendous millstone around the neck of the local artisan in the textile industry which has depressed and debased him to the earth: every act which he attempted, every measure he has devised to keep; up or to raise his wages, he has been told was illegal and the whole force of the civil power and influence of the district has been exerted against him because he was acting illegally.⁷³

In the minutes of evidence of the Committee of 1824, there are numerous references to the harshness of the laws, irrespective of their actual power or frequency of implementation. They were regarded by the workmen as a terrible imposition.⁷⁴

The interest of the supporters of the Bills must also be considering in assessing the importance of the legislation. Many Jacobin agitators had, as already noted, aroused fear:

... Robespierre unjustly oppressed the rich that he might support his popularity among the poor. Pitt has neglected, and by his wars and consequent taxes, oppressed the poor, to secure his popularity among the rich ... Robespierre set up a free constitution, and tyrannized in direct opposition to it. Pitt praises another free constitution, and tramples its provisions under foot.⁷⁵

Alarmed by the French example, the aristocracy and manufacturers combined;⁷⁶ the former were interested in halting radical

⁷³Quoted by S. and B. Webb, 86.

⁷⁴"The Select Committee on Artisans and Machinery" (1824). Parliamentary Papers (1824), House of Commons, Vol. V, 143, Evidence of John Alexander. In future references the abbreviation "S.C.A.M." will be used.

⁷⁵J. Thewall, The Tribune (London), 25 April, 1795. Quoted by Thompson, 159.

⁷⁶An added impetus to this 'combination' was given by the imposition of the income tax in 1797. As a tax upon middle class property owners it was bitterly resented, and introduces the possibility that the Act of 1799 was an effort at conciliatory legislation.

rhetoric and 'conspiracies', the latter in defeating these same 'conspiracies' attempts to raise wages. Both probably remembered the days when London lay at the mercy of a drunken and restless mob of Gordon rioters. A situation, both humiliating and frightening, which it was hoped would not be repeated through an underestimation of the danger of revolution. The Act of 1800 was then passed by a Parliament of anti-Jacobins and landowners who wished to codify all existing anti-union law and to simplify procedure. The novelty of the Act consisted in "the inclusive nature of the prohibition of all combinations and in the fact that they included no compensatory protective clauses."⁷⁷ Indeed the only solace which the unhappy worker might find lay in the brief prohibition of combinations among masters, a clause which unfortunately was quickly forgotten.

The magistrates found the new law extremely difficult to enforce and often had to resort to older laws specifically relating to conspiracy and combination in 'restraint of trade'. London courts, with their strongly radical core, often produced bizarre decisions;⁷⁸ in the provinces, however, the task was simpler. The coal miners' strikes present an interesting example of the new spirit which infected the authorities. In 1765, the miners on the Tyne and Wear had

⁷⁷Thompson, 504.

⁷⁸Thompson, 174.

struck over the custom of the Yearly Bond. It had been the practice of the masters to hire the miners on a yearly basis; workmen so hired being forced to appear at the pit if work was offered, but the employers were not bound to provide such work. The miners had been in the habit of working for several pits at once, so that they could work regularly. The employers in 1765 decided to end this practice and to hire men only on the production of a leaving certificate from the previous master. The miners 'turned out' and remained so for nearly six weeks; at the end of this period the masters capitulated. In 1810, a similar attempt was made to alter the practice of the Yearly Bond. This time, the military were summoned and arrests were made on an unprecedented scale. The gaols were overflowing; some men even had to be confined to the Bishop's stable for several weeks.⁷⁹ In this instance, the masters decided that the workers, by refusing to labour on their terms, were in a state of rebellion, and indicated that to demand justice was to demand revolution.

Identical action in many parts of the country by magistrates upholding the 'right' of the master, oppressed the labourer. In Wiltshire, a magistrate wrote that he had held out every temptation to accomplices without effect, and that he had already sent six shearmen to gaol, two for refusing to give evidence, "I am bringing forward as many cases as I

⁷⁸Arnot, 33.

can under the Combination Acts, and by forcing some to give evidence against others I hope to provoke quarrels among them, and by that means be able to bring some of their deeds to light."⁸⁰

The Acts also provided a very convenient pretext "for summoning and examining upon oath suspected persons."⁸¹ Thus, shrewd knocks, rather than deadly blows were aimed at the 'conspiracies'. The assumption of power by Napoleon had destroyed much of the radical incentive, save in a few instances often instigated by the dissident 'Irish';⁸² and such intolerant action on the part of the minions of the law against the innocent was approved. Many of the old Jacobins of the London Corresponding Society had 'turned their coat' and had begun writing hymns in praise of Pitt.⁸³ The Trade Unionists disappeared into trade clubs which were afforded a more hazy legality. The authorities tolerated them because they had not become completely blind and realised the need for some constitutional outlet for the expression of grievance. The age-old privilege of petitioning Parliament needed some sort of organization to make it effective; similarly, the

⁸⁰Quoted by Hammond, 74.

⁸¹J. L. Hammond, The Skilled Labourer (London: 1919), 176.

⁸²Ireland remained the 'Achilles Heel' of England throughout the Napoleonic War; note the abortive but alarming rising of Robert Emmet (1778-1803) in 1803. K. B. McDowell, Public Opinion and Government Policy in Ireland 1801-1846 (London: 1952) gives an excellent account of the problems involved.

⁸³Edward Baines had once been secretary of a "Jacobin Club" at Preston. By 1801 he was very anxious to disassociate himself entirely from such company. Thompson, 476.

magistrate who could settle price disputes needed some organization among the workmen with whom he could converse. The smaller industries with hundreds of independent masters, as in tailoring and shoe-making, were not adverse to dealing directly with their men in cases of minor dispute. In the larger industries, especially in the Midlands and the North - the cotton spinners, calico printers, pattern makers, millwrights, shipwrights, woolcombers and frame-work knitters to name but a few -- the hatred was greater and prosecutions under the Act attempted with greater frequency. Great success was hard to achieve however, competition imposed strict rules of its own and competitors often left one of their fellows unsupported. It was also notoriously difficult to get two workmen, as the Act required, to give evidence.⁸⁴

The Act of 1800 was therefore more of symbolic than effective importance; it isolated artisans and all combination by law; it created a schism in society; and it helped to establish the basis from which the working class could, through enforced introspection, gain self-awareness, an unlooked for after-effect:

The makers of the guild laws have erred, as almost all law-makers err, for not distinguishing between two things which are themselves essentially distinct and different. These are, a desired line of conduct, and a law to compel the line of conduct. It is one thing that a man ought to do a certain thing, it is another ... to make a law to compel that line of conduct.⁸⁵

⁸⁴"S.C.A.M." 28, 364, 295-300; Evidence of J. Martineau, colliery engineer; J. Lever, cotton carder; and O. Williams, woolen manufacturer, respectively.

⁸⁵T. Hodgskin, Travels in North Germany (2 Vols. Edinburgh: 1820), 23.

The General Combination Act was not an abrogation of class by government, but the announcement of an alliance; the aristocracy were not in effect saying 'L'Etat, c'est lui', but 'L'Etat, c'est nous!'

CHAPTER II

SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT 1801-1820

Corpses are cold in their tombs
Stones on the pavement are dumb,
Abortions are dead in the womb
And their mouths look pale, like the white shore
Of Albion free no more.

Her sons are as stones in the way,
They are masses of senseless clay
They are trodden and move not away
The abortion with which she travailleth
Is Liberty smitten to death.

Percy Bysshe Shelley. Lines Written during the Exe-
crable Castlereagh Admini-
stration.

The history of Britain had become the history of a civil war. The speeches and policies of Ministers, the letters and conduct of the magistrates, the records of the courts of justice, and the system of army deployment, attest to the cleft in British society. The internal 'class' war, for it can only be described in these terms although the participants were unaware of their roles, promoted a mutual hatred that gradually eclipsed the Napoleonic epic which raged from one

end of Europe to the other. The patronage element in the Whig and Tory character caused almost total aloofness and allowed the situation to rage unchecked. Thus, the two nations of which Disraeli was so unsparingly to describe in Sybil, were permitted to pursue their separate goals to the detriment of the country.

The difficult last decade of the eighteenth century ended with popular disturbances and an aristocracy inspired by Burke acting in joyous harmony. Shoulder to shoulder the peers of the realm stood together to face the twin foes of reform at home and revolution abroad. In the latter instance, they found that the bulk of the people supported their stand; the events in France which had culminated in the assumption of power by Napoleon, had not endeared those who supported democratic ideals to the Gallic cause. Thus, the aristocrats of England found little difficulty in directing the war towards a successful conclusion. Free from embarrassment in England, they performed honourably upon the battlefield and in the council chamber; Napoleon once remarked that his most formidable enemy was the English aristocracy.¹ Those who had earlier supported France, the Foxite Whigs and a few peers, were unable to enlist any further support and this deficiency combined with their own ineptitude ensured their rapid decline as a political force.

¹Quoted by A. J. Turberville, The House of Lords in the Age of Reform 1784-1837 (London: 1958), 19.

The situation of Parliament was, however, destroyed by the new spirit which now directed the oligarchs as a group. The rapid decline of the Whigs had begun in 1794 with the secession of the Grenville Whigs from those who followed Fox, a resurrection of the recently defunct practice of faction rather than party. The Tories had maintained a semblance of unity for a further ten years; not until the defeat of Addington by Pitt in 1804 did the party split. With the destruction of both parties it was now possible to reorganize. Therefore, in 1806 the nominally Whig 'Ministry of All the Talents', followed by the monolithic Tory administration led by Portland, inaugurated a period of one party rule which bore the name Tory but in fact was a coalition of the landed interest. Thus, in 1808, the Whigs were on the point of disintegration having lost much of their "raison d'^Aêtre". Factions became bitter enemies; Grey and Lauderdale, two of the Whig 'parties' foremost figures, even refused to attend Parliament for several weeks.² Three well-defined groups emerged -- the Grenville Whigs, the Foxites and the 'Mountain'. The 'Grenville condottieri' as they were contemptuously termed,³ were small in number but possessed vast borough influence. Lord Grenville, the leader of the group, had been conspicuous in his vigorous support of Pitt's Gagging

²Ibid., 148.

³Aspinall, Lord Brougham and ..., 38.

Acts of 1794, and throughout his life opposed any increase in the political power of the people at the expense of the aristocracy; as a group the Condottieri tried to follow an independent course, but were relatively unsuccessful. The Foxites whose leadership devolved upon Lord Grey and Ponsonby, at best followed a policy of uninspired opposition to some aspects of Tory policy, tending to wait hopefully for something to return them to power. The third group, the most consistent in its support of 'radicalism' and therefore in its opposition to the Tories, was named the 'Mountain'. Led by the brewer Whitbread, these reformers became the driving force behind any and all discernible Whig opposition during the war years:

If Mr. Whitbread and one or two others live, I do not despair seeing the day when no country schoolmaster shall turn up a little brat's posterior without having a petition against him in their honourable House which has so⁴ wisely turned its attention to these things lately.

Well supported by Bennett, Brougham, Creevey and Romilly, the 'Mountain' engineered a Whig revival in 1809; albeit short-lived, that effort was possibly the only year in which this Majesty's Loyal Opposition had in any way been effective. Basically, the Whig problem lay in their failure to find a common cause with an appeal which might extend their influence beyond the narrow limits of their own class, an area from which the Tories had largely excluded them. They were plagued

⁴Sir W. Scott, Familiar Letters, ed. David Douglas (2 Vols., Edinburgh: 1894), II, 398.

by the fact that they were as much pledged to the constitution as they were to their bumbling attempts to discredit the Tories in the eyes of the country. Being simply concerned with becoming the "Ins" and grasping the positions of power, they had formulated a program which entailed the furtherance of the aristocratic monopoly of government while holding out, at the same time, the promise of reform to the unprivileged and unpropertied masses. This was obviously difficult to maintain in practice, and, while in all probability genuinely sincere in trying to ameliorate the lot of the working class, they were ignorant of the true nature of the social problems, and uncompromisingly repudiated all concrete suggestions of reform. Thus, there was no Whig principle which the Whig party had not rejected when its supporters became too radical in their demands.⁵

The Tories, who relied more upon tradition and a preservation of the institutions of the past, were less split by dilemmas of doctrine. Burke's rejection of the French Revolution on the supposition that to cast away the 'legitimate' rulers and institutions was to discard freedom, found an enthusiastic audience among the aristocratic governors of England. The struggle to save England from the French "madness"

⁵G. E. Fasnacht, Acton's Political Philosophy (London: 1952), 73, cites examples used by Acton to demonstrate this theory: Fox repudiated Parliamentary Reform; Russell abandoned Free Trade; Grey conveniently forgot the Factory Laws; Melbourne fought Chartism; Palmerston did not like the principle of the ballot. In 1812 Grey, Grenville and the Whigs saw nothing that called for intervention at the very time the Tories were making frame-breaking a capital offence.

was therefore given its rationale, one that united a 'class'. Reform was rejected completely in its application to Parliament on similar grounds. Property, the symbol of 'established' wealth, was, they argued the safest criteria upon which to bestow power. For, if political power were to be given to those who did not possess property, the state would be unstable and for the sake of stability the new rulers would be forced to acquire property. Therefore, to avoid spoliation, property should be the qualification for the electoral franchise.⁶ In the Lords, Liverpool and Portland became the Tory leaders; in the Commons, the 'party' coalesced around Castlereagh, Sidmouth, Perceval and Canning. Only the Ultra Tories of the Cumberland and Eldon sort caused dissension by flitting in and out of office.

Within the sacrosanct halls of the Commons, a group, small in number and weak in influence but extremely vocal, purported to represent the people. Led by Sir Francis Burdett, member for Westminster, this clique acquired influence largely as a result of the innocuous behaviour of the Whigs. In general, the movement was designed to appeal to the middle class and during the war years they succeeded in enlisting the support of some Whigs, notably Brougham. The basis for the group's support derived primarily from the Borough of West-

⁶ E. Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, The Works of Edmund Burke, ed. G. Bell (8 vols., London: 1903-1910), II, 324.

minster. The Borough, one of the most 'open' in England, was controlled by the 'Rump'⁷, and this organization was in turn manipulated by a small group of men who were quite radical in their opinions. Henry Hunt has listed the more important members who remained outside Parliament in his own inimitable style:

... ye venal caluminating crew ... Ye paltry
tools of the Baronet, ye Places, Adamases, Clearys,
Brookses and⁸ Richters, belonging to the rump of
Westminster.

Hunt's destructive account of the 'war' between 'Sir Slygo' Burdett and the 'Cock of the Rump' Place, while full of exaggerated spleen contains enough truth to indicate the internal power struggles that were part of radical society.⁹ Major Cartwright¹⁰ and William Cobbett remained outside even after 1815 when the working classes of London began to assume at least a small part of the direction of the Westminster movement and it began to exhibit attitudes with which those two gentlemen could agree. During the Napoleonic Wars the London

⁷ The 'Rump' derived its name from the fact that it was composed of the survivors of a middle class radical group. This group had been formed to provide an effective party machine that might combat the influence of the Whigs and Tories in the open borough of Westminster.

⁸ Hunt, II, 64.

⁹ Ibid., II, 423-425.

¹⁰ Major Cartwright (1740-1824) was an important figure in the new Hampden Club movement. These Clubs were intended to continue the agitation of the old Corresponding Society and the Society for Constitutional Organisations. Each Hampden Club was nominally a separate body but the petitioning and propagandist meetings were co-ordinated by the itinerant activity of this veteran agitator.

radicals professed the broad spectrum of reform embracing all shades of middle class opinion. Yet, they failed to press any single aspect of this modest program except where they could act as an adjunct of the Whigs, using the latter's cloak of respectability. In consequence nothing was achieved, and it is against this betrayal of interest that the events after Waterloo must be placed. The lower orders' rebellions were as much a protest against their erstwhile leaders as against their masters. Therefore, the Luddite mode of agitation became the early model rather than the age-old Parliamentary devices which had appeared so ineffective in the hands of their "natural leaders".¹¹

The class divisions further hardened as a result of the rich variety of economic and political theory which had imposed abstract laws upon society; a theoretical framework within which every politician seemed to work. Even the least discerning radical noted the pernicious influence of those whom Cobbett sneeringly referred to as "feelosophers", and the hatred of the other 'nation' was intensified. It was T. R. Malthus, the country parson, who came to exemplify the worst aspects of these new theories for the working man.¹² They read that Malthus maintained that men were moral agents

¹¹Infra., 55-56.

¹²The following discussion is based upon material gleaned from; T. R. Malthus, Principles of Political Economy (2nd Ed., New York: 1951); T. R. Malthus, An Essay on Population (9th Ed., London: 1888); and E. Burke, An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs, Vol. II, Burke, The Works of

endowed with reason and will, but, as all men do not strive for their own good, let alone that of society, they must be forced to work if they are not to sink to the "level of brutes." The 'upper classes' were free of the brutish tendency; thus, they learnt, Malthus was able to place the inequality of man not merely on a physical and mental level but on the higher moral plane. Burke was even more dogmatic on this point, deciding that men are born with greatly unequal talents which are further differentiated by education, so much so that they become virtually "a different species of animal." Both emphatically agreed that an aristocracy of wealth and talent was infinitely superior to all other forms. This interpretation was, of course, anathema to the lower orders. To their horror they found that the philosophers had not finished. Malthus, postulated a principle of population and certain 'laws of nature' which if allowed to pass unrecognized would cause society to disintegrate into chaos. Large families, he explained, would make men work; by working regularly for others the labourers would acquire salutary habits of industry. Unfortunately most men will not work unless driven by the "goad of necessity". Thus, even were there no problem caused by population pressure, the need to labour would dictate 'inequality of property'. From the inequality of man to the inequality of property and a stratified society based upon inequality is the logic of his position. He looked at institutionalized class divisions and justified this social order by ascribing functions to each in the operation of a

market economy, a practice that can only be described as working from a conclusion to a premise. The landlords, by which he meant the landed aristocrats and country gentry, had been, he said, the founders of constitutional monarchy and, therefore, were essential to its maintenance. It was their function to "check the power of the crown and the violence of the people." The rents which they received, far from being the burdensome levy that Ricardo appeared to conceive, were a guarantee that population would never extinguish the arts and sciences by forcing all to work on the land. The corn laws provided the basis for industrial supremacy and the duties thereof gave added benefits to the English people. The middle class were equally important as consumers and he advocated the association of the new wealth with the old aristocratic orders, a goal the Whigs constantly pursued. To the lower classes his attitude was ambivalent. On the one hand he agreed with Adam Smith that they were the basis of productive society, on the other they were a mob which was to be distrusted. To those on poor relief he bestowed his most vigorous condemnation; describing them as indolent, lacking in prudence and thrift, and "inmates of the ale house". As far as Malthus was concerned, these vices were peculiar to the lower classes; the depravities of the aristocrats were completely irrelevant and to be ignored. The natural order of life was this hierarchy of class, and it derived from the laws of nature.

Malthus agreed with Adam Smith that the government should not interfere with economic matters save in areas of essential national interest; the Corn laws and primogeniture for instance. He was convinced that workmen must and, more important, were able to save in periods of full employment to offset the rigors of depression. Unfortunately, the workers did not save, "High wages ruined them", and their money was spent in "idleness and dissipation". In part, the Poor Law could be blamed as it had a bad effect -- promoting vice, encouraging a "redundant population" and a "spirit of dependence"; therefore, as a law it was morally bad. The workers were to have no recourse whatsoever that might allow them to ameliorate their lot. Combination or taxation to raise wages was an artificial means certain to lead to unemployment and increased misery. Low wages were the result of population pressure and nothing else. The price of day labour was the most stable of all prices and the best measure of value was a mean between the price of labour and the price of corn. Later, in his 'labour-exchange' theory of value, he advocated the concept that the amount of labour for which a unit of goods could be exchanged was ultimately set by the cost of production, which included 'normal' wages and 'normal' profit. Even if machinery lowered the cost of production, competition would push down the price of goods, so that the amount to be divided between labour and profits would remain constant. In the long run, wages could only rise at the expense of profits. In such a case, investment would be discouraged and this would,

in turn, reduce the demand for labour. There was, of course, no limit to be placed upon profit. Thus, the standard of living for the poor was inversely fixed to that of the upper classes. Malthusianism provided a comprehensive rationalization which legitimized the harsh treatment that was meted out to the poor. His thesis, that acute poverty existed because the poor were profligate, led to the assumption that misery was the lower class's own fault. It was upon such a basis that the actions of the government after 1815 were founded and the victims of this inhuman philosophy were not slow in realizing it.

The odium attached to the economic and political theorists of the upper class spilled over onto the philosophers of the middle class as far as the operatives were concerned. Benthamism was of a much more humane character than could be found in pure political economy. It became fashionable in certain quarters, but never achieved the enthusiastic endorsement of the workers. Nevertheless a love of humanity was clearly the underlying impetus of Bentham's social philosophy.¹³ Bentham feared the collapse of the old structure and attempted to build a theoretical construct based upon his vague formula "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". The principle of utility, while ambiguous to his

¹³ The following discussion is based upon: J. Bentham, A Fragment on Government, ed. F. C. Montague (London: 1931), and J. Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (New York: 1945).

contemporaries, was simply an effort to found a new moral discipline, and after 1809 he was continually shaping and expanding his set of fundamental tenets. The Utilitarians never became a large group, perhaps not until 1823 with the foundation of the Utilitarian society did they become a self-conscious school of thinkers.¹⁴ However, for many years there were meetings and informal dinners at Bentham's house, Ford Abbey, where Brougham, Romilly, Ricardo, Hume and Place, were all welcome. After 1807, their control over the radical clubs of Westminster and the steady addition of followers in Parliament, such as Burdett, Ricardo and Hume, assured the widespread influence of Bentham's ideas. Yet, while the original Benthamism was an attempt at social amelioration, the divergencies of the Mills, Nassau Senior and Chadwick shaded off into all colors of the political spectrum, from the laissez-faire economics of Nassau Senior to the state interventionism of Chadwick. Hallevy assigns the difference between Paine and the Benthamites, and the alienation of the workers from the middle class, to a disagreement over the principle of identity of human interests. Paine, he states, firmly holding that this identity was rational and prior to society, the Benthamites that it could be achieved by artificial means -- legislation.¹⁵ But there is a more obvious difference. A Paineite in the first quarter of the century was likely

¹⁴E. Hallevy, The Liberal Awakening, Vol. II, trans. E. Watkin, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century (6 Vols., New York: 1961), 189.

¹⁵E. Hallevy, The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism, trans. M. Morris (Boston: 1955), 187-90.

to be an excitable bookseller or journalist who worked for revolution, whereas the Benthamite was often a careful small business-man who had no wish to overthrow society. The latter followed the pedagogic route to the reformation of society, urging careful scrutiny of evidence and the formulation of vague generalizations. Francis Place (1771-1854), important to the topic of this thesis, entertained a variation of Bentham's philosophy which, while unique in many respects, provides a model through which the concepts of utilitarianism may be more clearly understood.

Place was a reformer because he believed in the doctrine of self improvement and self help.¹⁶ Nevertheless, his mind remained closed to the real social problems; he refused, for example, to go North to see for himself the difficulties faced by the operatives in the new industries. He agreed with Malthus that the working class if demoralized were so from ignorance, but held that education was a panacea by which that ignorance might be dispelled, a truism culled from Paine. However, he had opposed the London Corresponding Society on the grounds of demagogy, and was faced with the dilemma, as were many middle class radicals, of reconciling theory with practice. His association with the Benthamites convinced him of the validity of his own rise from worker to master, presenting a model which all could follow. Place

¹⁶W. E. Morris, "Francis Place and Working Class History", Historical Journal, V (No. 1, 1962), 62.

tended to be doctrinaire, approaching the tenets of Benthamism as a body of doctrine to be taught to the people, who, in turn, when recognising the operation of the laws, would by numerical strength force the government to do likewise:

If any very considerable portion of the people understood the principle of utility, government would be compelled to conform thereto and become as good as it is possible they can be. They who govern would then become wiser and wiser and would always be in advance, instead of being, as they are at present, behind the more intelligent part of the community.¹⁷

Place pragmatically assumed the role of disseminator of information, collector of facts and gazetteer. His working class origins, which he never forgot, kept him aloof from the intellectual theoreticians among the Benthamites like Ricardo and Grote.¹⁸ Therefore, he was able to turn to Malthusian statistics for confirmation of his demand for self improvement, while others of his philosophy were repelled by Malthus. Place willingly defended the poor from the charge of vice, but uncompromisingly substituted his own experience. This philosophical dogmatism gradually caused the estrangement of the Charing Cross tailor from the operatives, finally ending in his complete isolation in 1838.¹⁹

¹⁷"Place to Joseph Hume", October 25th, 1829, Thomas, 63.

¹⁸Thomas, 64.

¹⁹Place completely failed to anticipate the strength of the Chartist movement, insisting that the populace at this date were contented.

The workers, as they became aware of the obstacles against which they were fighting, were repelled by both the callous and the humanitarian answers to their problems:

It is not uncommon for one hundred thousand operatives (mark that word, for words in this sense are things) to be out of employment at once in the cotton districts, and thrown upon parochial relief, to be dependent upon hard hearted task masters for food. The Malthusian doctrine would indeed afford a certain means of relief, if this were not a two-fold question. If, when you say to a man -- 'You have no claim upon me; you have your allotted part to perform in the world, so have I. In this state of nature, indeed, had I food, I should offer you a share from sympathy, from humanity; but in this advanced and artificial state of society, I cannot afford you relief; you must starve. You, came into the world when it could not sustain you. What would be this man's answer? He would say -- 'You disclaim all connection with me, I have no claims on you? I can then have no duties towards you, and this pistol shall put me in possession of your wealth. You may leave a law behind you which shall hang me, but what man who saw assured starvation before him ever feared hanging? It is this accursed practice of ever considering only what seems expedient for the occasion, disjoined from all principle or enlarged systems of actions, of never listening to the true unerring impulses of our better nature, which has led the colder hearted men to the study of political economy, which has turned over Parliament into a real committee of Public safety. In it all power is vested; and in a few years we shall either be governed by an aristocracy, or what is more likely, by the contemptible democratic oligarchy of glib economists compared to which the worst form of aristocracy would be a blessing.²⁰

The lower orders own answer to the problem was to try a separate way.

The combinations among workmen flourished during the

²⁰ "Table Talk", recorded by T. Alsop; repr. Nonesuch Coleridge, 476-477. Quoted by R. Williams, Culture and Society (London: 1958), 58.

war with France but achieved little. Place was probably correct in assuming that prosecutions under the law of 1800 were not so much the consequence of a desire to keep the people in a state of subjection to their employers as a means of persuasion that enabled those employers to get their work done at less expense, a lucrative proposition in a war economy. Thus, the Glasgow and Lancashire cotton weavers found themselves free to combine openly for the purpose of seeking legal means to ameliorate their relative positions. The extent of this combination was reported by Alexander Richmond before the Committee on Artisans and Machinery in 1824. He indicated an organization that stretched throughout the whole of the three kingdoms; Lancashire, Cumberland, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and the North of Ireland.²¹ With this combination, as with many others, it was only when an attempt was made to achieve a concrete aim that the anomalies of the system appeared in their most ubiquitous garb. The cotton workers of that Union had struck and been vigorously suppressed by the military; whereas Gravener Henson's struggle to implement the same laws against the employers met formal difficulties of the most frustrating nature.²² The Sheffield Mercantile and Manufacturing Union had for its main rule that no employer was to pay higher prices for any article in Sheffield more than had been current in the previous year, and even threatened a penalty of £100 for each contraven-

²¹"S.C.A.M.", 66; evidence of Mr. A. Richmond, cotton weaver.

²²Ibid., 292; evidence of G. Henson.

tion of this rule. There was no prosecution against these men for combination.²³ The operatives of Preston conducted a Union openly throughout the whole period, and again there was no prosecution. The abortive strike of the journeymen printers of The Times in 1810 was, on the other hand, an excuse for "cruel persecutions ... carried to an almost incredible extent".²⁴ These poor men were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from nine months to two years. Sir John Sylvester -- "Bloody Black Jack" - in sentencing them, denounced their "most wicked conspiracy" to injure the very employers who gave you bread." A concrete objective coupled with the continued ill-will and suspicion that had been the legacy of the seventeen nineties, was all that was needed periodically to reawaken inbred fear and to encourage the practice of magistrates who sent spies into taverns and into the little societies and chapels which were suspected of concealing dastardly traitors. It was a constant vigil designed to amputate each incipient stir that might indicate a movement of the people's myriad hands. Strangely, but in retrospect perhaps less so, the most vigorous movement occurred in the relatively unorganized form of Luddism,²⁵ with the 'mythical' figure of Ned Ludd leading the machine breakers who had erupted against unrestrained capitalism.

²³S. and B. Webb, 73.

²⁴Wallas, 200.

²⁵Engels would not agree with this analysis. He describes the Luddite insurrection as "the first organized resistance of the workers, as a class, to the bourgeoisie". Engels, 243.

These "last of the Guildsmen" spontaneously promoted terror and were a difficult subject for law.²⁶ In this instance, it was singularly fortunate for the masters that the war had bred patriots and the country as a whole would not brook rebellion. While the Luddites fellow workers watched and did not aid the military, they, themselves, did not follow the machine breaking example.

Although in this episode of working class history conciliation was not attempted, in other areas some effort to reverse the process that led to class distinction was being made. However, it was usually from a negative rather than a positive standpoint. Place, ever a model of opportunism, carefully drew up the by-laws for the British and Foreign Society at its formation in 1813. He wholly omitted the words 'poor' and 'labouring poor', and took care that there would not be any phrase "which could give offence or hurt the feelings of anyone."²⁷ Yet, in general, fear and avarice combined to prevent any real compassion for the unfortunate sufferers in society. Henry Hunt, exhibiting a remarkable degree of perception, ably summarized the position during these years:

Those who have robbed the people of their political liberty, will not fail to rob them of their portion of their earnings ... mechanics and artisans, if they have no voice in electing a Member of Parliament, must not be surprized if, under the Combination Laws, they see laws to prevent them from obtaining a fair market price for their labour .. when they become infuriated with their oppressors, they commit the

²⁶Thompson, 552.

²⁷Wallas, 95.

most wanton and brutal acts of cruelty, in their fits of desperation.²⁸

As a direct result of the lack of representation and the consequent division of the social organism, the stronger, in this case the 'natural aristocracy', exploited the weaker, the masses. This presented a classic situation of class oppression, an example the socialists of the nineteenth century gleefully used as a buttress for their arguments.

The peace of 1815 brought further distress and disillusionment instead of plenty. This may have been caused by international economic forces, or by the mistaken financial policies of the Tory government. But, irrespective of the reasons for the "dreary years ... hard times for the poor ill-times for everybody",²⁹ the lower orders deteriorated physically but, in the eyes of their champions, never in spirit:

... those who still had the spirit and the pride to keep from the parish book were suffering the most cutting penury and the greatest privation ... almost driven to a state bordering upon starvation, before he a labourer would admit the degrading idea of asking for parochial alms.³⁰

The first rebel note that sounded in the post war years was the cry for bread; an echo from the eighteenth century that the people confidently expected to be answered. However, while the Ministers and their supporters declared themselves to be sympathetic to the prevalent distress, they were convinced that its sources were of a nature that precluded

²⁸Hunt, II, 303-304.

²⁹A. Somerville, The Autobiography of a Working Man (New Ed., Plymouth: 1951), 12.

³⁰Hunt, II, 180.

the intervention of Parliament. Yet, paradoxically, they thought that it was a criminal offence for demagogues to tell the unemployed what the Honourable Members themselves believed, that the House was incapable of helping them.³¹ The government thus ignored the hunger and general welfare of the people. Instead, Lord Liverpool preferred to listen to the landowners and to introduce the Corn Law of 1815.³² There was but feeble opposition from the Whigs, were they not landowners? In 1820, the notorious Black Book argued convincingly that:

... the Aristocracy have exempted themselves almost entirely from imposts, while the burden falls exclusively on the people ... the duties imposed by the Corn Laws are a tax paid directly for the support of that order.³³

This new strengthening of the two nation concept did not pass unnoticed by the despised 'demagogues'. The critics of the government went to the root of the problem as they saw it, and sought a change in the Constitution rather than a change in policy. Old Major Cartwright established the first Hampden Club in 1814, after the Peace of Paris; and sent around petitions calling for annual Parliaments, equal electoral districts

³¹The Earl of Harrowby, The Lord President of the Council, ascribed the disturbances to the great growth of the industrial population, the fluctuations in trade which caused much unemployment, and the fact that the unemployed became a ready prey to agitators. This analysis was extremely perceptive of the noble Lord; however, he used this sound assessment to condemn the practice of telling people the truth. Annual Register, LXI (1819), 154-157.

³²Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 1st Series, XXX (March 15, 1815) 175-186.

³³J. Wade, The Black Book; or Corruption Unmasked (London: 1831), 390.

and votes for all tax payers. William Cobbett began his most famous of publications, Two Penny Trash, in November 1816, and attempted to rouse public opinion so that it might force reform by constitutional means. Twenty thousand copies of the famous "No. 18" were sold before a fortnight had passed,³⁴ and forty four thousand before the month was out, "Let corruption wipe that out if it can."³⁵ There were sporadic riots in 1815-1816 in many parts of the country, generally due to the renewed fear of the workers that the introduction of machinery would create unemployment, or to the actual unemployment created by the cancellation of war contracts and by demobilization. There was no serious revolutionary movement, however; indeed, many of the cheap pamphlets with which the country was flooded were not radical at all.³⁶ To the oligarchy in power it seemed incredible that the rapid growth of social unrest, coinciding with the swift proliferation of periodical publications, was not due to a conspiracy. It is likely that the reverse was true. To 1815 radicalism had been virtually a middle class movement inspired by men like Horne Tooke, Burdett and Bentham, in a sense they could be said to be involved in a political conspiracy. But in 1816, the movement had been seized by the skilled artisans, amongst whom the

³⁴ Cobbett's Political Register, XXI (November 16, 1816) 316.

³⁵ Ibid., XXXI (November 30, 1816), 673.

³⁶ Aspinall, Politics and, 29.

growth of a political consciousness marked the introduction of a new force in English politics, particularly after they had allied the unskilled to their cause. The lean years had shaken the lower orders out of their inertia and directed their energies against their 'betters'. This new form of agitation had a spontaneity unknown among the more planned conspiratorial cliques who aspired for power in the upper echelons of society. It was a movement almost led by default by men such as Cobbett and Hunt; men who aimed at separating the lower classes from the whole body of well-to-do politicians. This attitude, of course, created increased resentment between the 'old' and the 'new' radicals. Place remarked that Cobbett was "too ignorant to see that the common people must ever be imbecile ... when not encouraged and supported by those who have money and influence."³⁷ Of Hunt he was even more critical: "... Hunt has been with me. He is a pretty sample of an ignorant, turbulent, mischief-making fellow, a highly dangerous one in turbulent years."³⁸ Hunt, however, saw his role in politics in a much different light. In his Memoirs he remarks that:

There is ... difference ... between a drunken, riotous Church and King mob of 1791-1796, pulling down and burning the property of Dr. Priestly at Birmingham, poor Campbell at Bath, burning mills, wheat ricks, destroying machinery etc. etc., and the peaceable, sober, rational, constitutional assemblies of the people of 1816, 1817, and 1819, deliberately petitioning the legislature to remove the burthens of the

³⁷ Wallas, 117.

³⁸ "Place to James Mill", September 2, 1816, Wallas, 119.

people by abolishing sinecure places and unnecessary pensions, and praying for constitutional reform in the Commons.³⁹

Yet both Place and Hunt were wrong. The form the agitation took in those years depended, as Southey pointed out to Crabb Robinson in 1816, upon the people themselves. They did have sufficient education and knowledge to perceive that they were entitled to better conditions, but not enough to discover the cause or remedy of their troubles. In such a state, with habits formed by Benefit societies and the pre-1800 unions, judgements were easily perverted and passions aroused, as had happened with the Ludditte movement.⁴⁰ The Blanketeers of March 1817 were only pitiful unemployed Lancashire artisans, but they did carry a petition which demanded the dismissal of the King's ministers, and, in part, their hope was to intimidate the government. The Spenceans were responsible for this violent trend in the working class movement,⁴¹ taking advantage of the distress and confusion to organize meetings of a deliberately incendiary nature so as to promote disorder. The Spa Fields meeting of December 2nd, under the auspices of Dr. Watson, one of the most devoted disciples of Thomas Spence (1750-1814), demanded the surrender of the guard of the Tower of London. The alarm among the ruling elite had

³⁹Hunt, I, 223.

⁴⁰H. Crabb Robinson, Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson (3rd Ed., 3 vols., London: 1869), II, 31.

⁴¹M. Beer, A History of British Socialism (2 vols., London: 1919), I, 101-142.

not been sounded without some cause. Nevertheless, the exaggerations of danger which found ready credence were often the result of police agent provocateurs, such as the infamous Oliver. The Gagging Acts of June 1817 even went so far as to close the Cambridge Union Society; and, in the debate on the suspension of the Habeus Corpus Act, Lord Sidmouth contended that the existence of a traitorous conspiracy for a general insurrection and plunder of property was proved. He lamented:

... that malignant spirit which has brought such disgrace upon the domestic character of the people; so soon, too, after the period when the fidelity and quality displayed by the nation had placed it at the loftiest pinnacle of glory.⁴²

His Majesty's Loyal Opposition looked on the whole radical activity with disfavour, preferring to adopt retrenchment as a rallying cry and the repeal of the obnoxious income tax as a political objective. A faction within the Whig party did try to align the old middle class radical movement with their own party, a move that had been advocated by Bentham for many years. Henry Brougham was the main instigator of this attempt and he succeeded in attaching the radical demands for the abolition of slavery and the freedom of the Press to the Whig program. Brougham's endeavour was, from the outset, almost certain to fail. He quickly became the butt of the Tories and after a rather too vigorous attack on the Prince

⁴²Parl. Deb., 1st Series, XXXV (February 24, 1817), 553.

Regent lost the support of many in his own party:

He makes his mouth a puddled ditch for kings,
 Bourbons and Brunswicks in the scum are stirr'd
 Indeed the Stuarts get a kinder word.
 By him mere trifles are tremendous made;
 A smuggler moves him more than stagnant trade,
 Large seeds of lupin, thus, small growth are given
 While tiny mustard seed sends it's tree to heaven.
 Thus the ant-eater hunts not game that leaps,
 But lolls its slimy tongue to catch what creeps.
 The moment Br--m pronounces "something's wrong",
 "Hear" shouts each Ex., the lobbies hear prolong.
 Chop houses clamour, newspapers indict,
 And something's wrong turns to nothing right.
 Pil'd Babels of petitions heaven ascend, ⁴³
 And call Reform from Hebrid to Land's End.

Brougham had initially met with some success; and, on March 23rd, 1816, received a glowing testimonial from Place. ⁴⁴ However, the wooing of the radical horse was not followed by political advancement and the ambitious lawyer quickly dropped the courtship: ⁴⁵

In conclave assembled, and patriots they,
 All eager to rule and all loth to obey,
 Yet doomed to endeavour to settle together
 On whom fall the choice of Parties bell-wether ...
 "In leading besides I (Brougham) have ventured to dabble,
 The London Reformers, the Liverpool rabble,
 The Palace yard mob (though it was an affront
 To be hiss'd and dismiss'd for a fellow like hunt);
 Make ME then your leader to thump and to thunder,
 A pilot most excellent bar a big blunder." --
 Some grinn'd shook their heads, while a spreading
 catarrh
 O'erpower'd the lungs of the Man at the Bar. ⁴⁶

⁴³"The Talents Run Made", quoted by Aspinall, Lord Brougham and ..., 49.

⁴⁴"Place to Bennett", March 23, 1816, Wallas, 118.

⁴⁵Wallas, 118.

⁴⁶"The Choice of a Leader", Morning Post, February 6, 1818; quoted by Aspinall, Lord Brougham and, 70.

Lord Liverpool, leader of the Tory government, was himself smitten by the current Malthusianism, believing that the cabinet could do little to relieve the evils of pauperism and unemployment and could not lighten the burdens they had placed upon the people, he regarded criticism even by those in his own party as not only factious but disloyal. In view of the danger of a great social upheaval, he relied upon the patriotism of the Whigs to refrain from attacking the ministry and forcing it to capitulate. The slogan 'rally around the throne' and the closing of Whig and Tory ranks after 1816, against the anti-social demands of the radicals, were, as Wilson pointed out, "to be the watchword for the oblivion of the past and a new impulse to the Pitt policy."⁴⁷ The extent to which the plan achieved a degree of success even among the Whigs, may be inferred from the text of one of Brougham's letters in 1817:

All differences among our friends are removed, and we are firmly united on almost every point (I mean in the House of Commons) ... fighting ... and putting down the pernicious and insane rabble, equally the enemies of us and the people.⁴⁸

The uneasy alliance had, however, many conflicting personalities who sought power on a purely personal basis, the mercurial Brougham not least. The Tories were saved possible embarrassment by the death of Princess Charlotte and Brougham's

⁴⁷Aspinall, Lord Brougham and, 73.

⁴⁸"Brougham to Lansdown ", February 8, 1817. Quoted Aspinall, Lord Brougham and, 74.

defeat in the election for the county of Westmoreland in 1818. Again, the Whigs had reached a low point in their political fortunes, even their great figures had been defeated.

The good harvest of 1817 and a temporary revival in trade caused the disorder to subside in the following twelve months. The economic conditions became so favourable that the economy attained the proportions of a boom. It was short-lived, however, and the revolutionary language employed by newspapers, especially those that sprang into prominence after 1815, continued unabated. The press, during this post war activity, wielded unprecedented power. Its almost evangelical zeal to reach unlimited numbers, and a penchant for controversy and outrageous opinion recreated virtually all the conditions which had so frightened the oligarchy in the 1790's. The extent of their influence is surprizing, for while there was freedom from censorship there was very little real freedom of the press. In the eighteenth century, this phrase meant freedom to publish but subject to the consequences of the laws.⁴⁹ To Blackstone, "the liberty of the Press ... consists of laying no previous restraint upon publication and not in freedom from censure for criminal matter when published."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, rhetoric in the Press, according to Thompson, was usually pitched, "just the right side of treason".⁵¹

⁴⁹Sir J. F. Stephen, History of the Criminal Law (3 vols., London: 1883), II, 349.

⁵⁰Sir W. Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England (16th ed., 4 vols., Philadelphia: 1902), IV, 151.

⁵¹Thompson, 626.

There were a number of stock phrases intended to evoke strong emotion. Revolution was described as, "the sum of liberty", "an electric fluid", "the spirit of liberty", the wholesome thunder that would purify an infected atmosphere ... of pestilentious vapours", "the progress of reason", "the march of mind", "the march of intellect", "the light and many others. Similarly, resistance to these forces was described unsparingly as "despotism", and the medium through which 'despotism' planned its resistance as "the temple of hypocrisy", the result of the "stupidity and ignorance of antiquated systems, superstition and darkness".⁵² Such phrases were significant as far as many members of the establishment were concerned, and they acted accordingly. The Rector of Brosely heavily punished two vendors of one journal:

About two months since I caused two men to be apprehended under the Vagrant Act who were distributing Cobbett's pamphlet, and had them well flogged at the whipping post; since which I have heard of no others being circulated in the neighbourhood.⁵³

The Black Dwarf, edited by Wooler, contains an interesting poem on the actions of such officials in the numerous libel cases of the day:

⁵²The metaphorical language of this nature were extremely common, for typical examples see Sherwin's Political Register, August 12, 1820, 219; Black Dwarf, February 23, 1820, 185; March 15, 1820, 350; March 27, 1822, 466; May 10, 1820, 642; and December 26, 1821, 930; The Republican, July 28, 1820, 472; August 4, 1820, 510; September 20, 1820, 6. Quoted by H. G. Weissner, The Working Class and European Affairs 1815-1848 (Ann Arbor: 1965), 136.

⁵³"Letter from the Rector of Brosely to the Home Office", February 6, 1817. Quoted by Wickwar, 50.

This is the jury that cast [convicted]
Which was picked by the Master
Who held his place by the Judge,
Who was appointed by the Minister
That accused the men of libel.⁵⁴

The prosecuting societies⁵⁵ did not hesitate to take every unfair advantage that an antiquated judicial system allowed them. It was often cheaper for the accused man to pay the expense so far incurred by the prosecution in order to 'stay' the proceedings, however vexatious it might be, than to run the risk of trial by expensive jury and the increased costs which would fall to him to pay along with the penalty imposed by the court. Yet, in spite of all these advantages, every important political trial held in London went against the government in 1817.⁵⁶

The agricultural and industrial situation worsened again towards the end of 1818, and the temper of the people at the beginning of 1819 was aptly summarized in John Wade's Gorgon motto:

Let not whatever illls prevail
A damned aristocracy prevail.

In 1818, Hunt's flag at the hustings for the Westminster seat was blatantly revolutionary, a vivid scarlet. Sherwin's Political Register urged that "killing ruffians who call themselves a Government is not murder."⁵⁷ With gluttoned foreign

⁵⁴Black Dwarf, November 26, 1817. Quoted by Wickwar, 12.

⁵⁵The most notable of these was the "Society for the Suppression of Vice and the encouragement of Religion and Virtue". It was founded in 1802.

⁵⁶W. H. Wickwar, The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press (London: 1928), 50.

⁵⁷Sherwin's Political Register, October 24, 1818. Quoted by Wickwar, 70.

markets, lowered wages and a shrinking purchasing power, the incendiary demagogues so feared by the aristocracy, found a willing audience. A Huddersfield manufacturer, Horsfall, was shot at his door and a cheer rang out from every house in the neighbourhood.⁵⁸ Somerville, a working man himself, described the reaction in the agricultural districts to the revolutionary events:

... some sons of farmers and sons of other people who read newspapers, told one another of a terrible set of men in some parts of the Kingdom called radicals, who were threatening to take the lives and destroy all the property of all good people; that only for the soldiers who stopped them, the radicals would have come to Birnyknows before that time and would have burned it and killed everybody.⁵⁹

The agricultural districts were, in general, less effected by the depression as a game described by Somerville eloquently shows:

... as the soldiers were more respectable in the eyes of the better dressed sons of farmers and tradesmen, and as they took the lead in everything, they made themselves soldiers; and, in addition to that, took upon themselves to pick out those who were to be radicals. This was done according to quality of clothes worn ... some laid hold of me by the feet to carry me off to be hanged and beheaded, as the real laws upon the real radicals had taught them to imitate in play.⁶⁰

By the middle of 1819 the main industries of England, particularly textiles, were in desperate straits. The wages of the handloom weavers, once twenty five shillings a week, sank to five shillings. The summer was unusually hot for

⁵⁸A. Bryant, The Age of Elegance (Edinburgh: 1954), 378.

⁵⁹Somerville, 15.

⁶⁰Ibid., 17.

England and the situation seemed to be swiftly building towards an explosion. The Annual Register reported that political agitators were disseminating seditious literature throughout the manufacturing districts. Hundreds of field meetings were organized to hear harangues on the iniquities of government and the need for radical reform. Inflammatory banners, caps of liberty and tricolors, indeed, all the trappings of the French Revolution appeared. This climax occurred with the mass meeting at St. Peter's Field, Manchester, and the violent scattering of those that attended. The famous 'Peterloo' massacre of August 16, 1819 split England irrevocably, finally giving physical substance to the situation which had been present for many years. Parliament, hastily summoned in November, was besieged from all sides, even the Whigs found time to express horror at the spilling of English blood by Englishmen.⁶¹ The Times, to that date an apologist for the Government, for the first time swung to position in favour of the masses, to follow public opinion.⁶² Even larger numbers of newspapers and journals appeared. The Democratic Recorder and Reform Guide, edited by Edmonds, advocated "if ever it was the duty of Britain's to resort to the use of arms to recover their freedom and hurl vengeance

⁶¹Parl. Deb. 1st Series, XLI (November 23, 1819), 81-87. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Grenville defended the actions of the magistrates at Peterloo more strenuously than any Government spokesman; and Government supporters belauded his speech as one of the finest they had ever heard. Turburville, 174 n.1.

⁶²Aspinall, Politics and ..., 312. In 1820, The Times had originally been against Queen Caroline, but an alarming decrease in sales had caused the editor to turn right round in her favour.

on the heads of their tyrants it is now."⁶³ The Cap of Liberty, whose editor was Durst, pledged itself to point out to the people when they should take up arms.⁶⁴ Carlile, the most famous or infamous journalist depending on the point of view, "hoisted the black ensign of unqualified defiance and like a pirate cockboat sailed into the middle of the combined fleets of Church and State."⁶⁵ For his temerity Carlile was prosecuted for libel, and through a defiant almost insolent stand managed to arouse the passions to an even higher pitch, making his trial one of the great events of the year.

On November 24th the Spenceans organized a rally at Smithfield; one of the placards read:

Not to A - MS let each poor man fly!
Let Freedom live and TYRANTS DIE.
Arch-Fiends have Civil War begun
Death to the wretch that now would run.⁶⁶

Direct verbal attacks were made upon the Prince Regent and upon Parliament. Hone's parody of the Prince Regent's speech at the opening of the Session is justly famous:

Go and impress, my friends, on all classes
To sleek faced swindlers down to half starved asses,
That from religious principles alone
Don't be such damned fools as to blab your own --
Temperance, chasteness, conjugal attention
With other virtues that I need not mention.....
Can they expect to gain divine protection
And save their sinful bodies from dissection.⁶⁷

⁶³Quoted by Wickwar, 35.

⁶⁴Ibid.,

⁶⁵Thompson, 720.

⁶⁶Quoted by Wickwar, 53.

⁶⁷Quoted by Wickwar, 13,

At the beginning of 1820 many influential figures thought that the country was on the verge of a civil war.⁶⁸ In Birmingham, two armed parties quickly organized, the 'Society of Radicals' and 'The Loyal Association for the Suppression of Blasphemy and Sedition'. The vendors of libellious material were imprisoned -- a cripple was gaoled at Exeter till he could provide bail for £200 for selling Hone's parody on the Lord's prayer; in Manchester, an apprentice was sentenced to four months imprisonment and a ten year old boy was fined sixpence; in Bolton, two men were given two months in gaol each for selling a Sherwin letter to soldiers; and in Cheshire, Swann received four and a half years.⁶⁹ Many of the prosecutions were certainly unjust, and the result of the activities of the newly formed Constitutional Association. Founded for the express purpose of chastising the disseminators of sedition, it based many of its cases upon the decision of Sir W. D. Best as to the nature of libel, "if you find it an appeal to the passions of the lower orders of the people, and not having a tendency to inform those who can correct abuses, it is a libel."⁷⁰ Yet, the agitation, mass meetings, conspiracy, blood-shed, and harsh treatment under the law failed to create

⁶⁸C. C. Greville, Greville Memoirs; A Journal in the Reigns of King George IV and King William IV, edited by R. Fulford and L. Strachey (New Ed., 8 vols., London: 1888), II, 37.

⁶⁹Wickwar, 105-107. For a further discussion of the Swann affair see Thompson, 731.

⁷⁰State Trials, New Series, I, 50-51.

a revolution. Perhaps, if ever Methodism and Evangelicalism did prevent a revolution of the French variety in England, it was in 1819-1820. It certainly must have split the lower orders into pious believers and disaffected outsiders, making the field of religion the political battleground, a struggle of ideas rather than of classes. Undoubtedly some degree of organization was imparted to the early radical societies by the example of Methodism; yet, "Methodism is as far removed from Democracy ... as it is from sin. It is dissent and yet it is an enemy to the principle of dissent."⁷¹ At the Methodist conference at Bristol in 1819 the members were warned:

Remember that you belong to a Religious society which has from the beginning explicitly recognised as high and essential parts of Christian duty to Fear God and honour the King; to submit to the magistrate for conscience sake; and not to speak evil of dignitaries ... Abhor those publications in which they are assailed,⁷² along with every other doctrine of your holy religion.

At one point the Wesleyans threatened to expel from their society any member who even attended a public meeting.⁷³

Methodism was a cross-current to the main stream of class, creating confusion where none would have otherwise existed.

Richard Carlile noted an interesting phenomenon in the Repub-

⁷¹This comment of J. R. Beard in 1831, quoted by Wickwar, 78, is supported by the work of R. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800-1850 (London: 1947). On page 49 of that book he states, "the working-class portions of the community that came under the influence of Methodism were conspicuous, not by their alliance with, but their aloofness from the agitations."

⁷²"Address signed by the President of the Conference and by the Secretary Jabez Bunting, at Bristol on August 7, 1819. Minutes of Methodist Conferences, V, 63. Quoted by Wickwar, 79.

⁷³"An Address to the Wesleyan Methodist Societies for the Committee of Conferences for Safeguarding their Religious Privileges." Quoted by Wickwar, 80.

lican. He found that many who came into his shop delighted in the attacks made upon the Dissenters while deploring similar assaults upon Government; others, equally numerous took the opposite view. He remarked, "I can safely say that I have but rarely found the individual that would express his approbation of my conduct generally."⁷⁴ From some quarters came the attempt to equate radicalism with diabolism:

From his brimstone bed at the break of Day
A-mobbing the Devil is gone
To visit his Radical Friends in Town
And see how Reform goes on ...
He saw Carlile by his blasphemous pile
Man's Laws and God's Law's defying
Said Satan, "I see, they have no need of me,⁷⁵
While such friends with my oars are plying.

Religion notwithstanding, there were other factors which were probably more important in preventing revolution. Combinations provided a framework upon which a class conspiracy might have been built; however, they had been pushed into the background as far as the general masses were concerned immediately after the war. Trade unions continued to operate quietly but the more energetic leaders directed their attention to the reformation of the political system. John Gast, the shipwright leader in London, had founded a general union under the impressive title Philanthropic Hercules, and even inaugurated a Union newspaper, the Gorgon. Both were shortlived and any

⁷⁴Republican, III (April 7, 1820), 400.

⁷⁵Manchester Patriot, August 28, 1819. Quoted by Wickwar, 81.

real success that was achieved in the organization of the working men occurred purely on the local scene.

The Fifth Report of the Select Committee of 1824 contains the evidence of members of the council of Liverpool who detailed the numerous but unco-ordinated strikes of the shipwrights of that city in 1816, 1818, 1819, 1820 and 1821, all of which were accompanied by violence.⁷⁶ The employers similarly combined, in the fashion of the war years. The landowners of Tiverton at a "numerous and respectable meeting at the Town Hall" in 1816, resolved that in consequence of the low price of provisions not more than a certain specified wage should be paid smiths, carpenters, masons and thatchers; certainly a combination on a grand scale.⁷⁷ A declaration dated June 16, 1819, and signed by fourteen Lancashire manufacturers, regretted that they had to lower wages due to the actions of a few competitors, and "for their own part heartily condemned the measure."⁷⁸ Although from this evidence it would appear that the law of 1800 was no longer operative, the reverse was indeed the case. There were numerous prosecutions in the critical year of 1819; generally, journeymen were prosecuted nominally for leaving work unfinished, but in reality for

⁷⁶"S.C.A.M.", 366; Evidence of W. Statham and J. Topham, the Town clerk and his deputy of Liverpool.

⁷⁷S. and B. Webb, 93.

⁷⁸The Times, August 5, 1819.

combination.⁷⁹ In this same year, Francis Place was quite optimistic that he would obtain the Select Committee for which he had been campaigning since 1814 to repeal the Combination Laws.⁸⁰ His optimism had been aroused by the apparent success of the Gorgon in stimulating interest among Members of Parliament in repeal. Joseph Hume, an indefatigable radical in the Whig party was induced through the medium of this newspaper to aid Place.⁸¹ The latter's efforts in interfering in all disputes that were reported in the newspaper by writing to "a great many trade societies"⁸² also appeared to be achieving a degree of success. But his labours failed and he was himself forced to admit that there seemed to be very little real interest among any of the principal groups involved. He said of the operatives that they were:

Habitually cunning, and suspicious of all above their own ranks in life, and have no expectation of mitigation, much less of a chance of the laws being repealed, they could not persuade themselves that my communications were of any value to them, and they would not therefore give themselves any trouble about them, much less to give such information as might, they thought, be someday used against them.⁸³

Two problems probably precluded from the success of these attempts, just as it foiled any radical call to revolution. As already seen Place and his friends in the Westminster 'Rump'

⁷⁹The iron founders were prosecuted on this pretext; H. J. Fyrth and H. Collins, The Foundry Workers (Manchester: 1959), 18. Other examples may be found in A. Aspinall, The Early English Trade Unions (London: 1949), Chapter VIII, 313-343.

⁸⁰"Place to Hobhouse", August 10, 1819; Wallas, 204.

⁸¹Wallas, 205.

⁸²Ibid., 203.

⁸³Ibid., 203-204.

were no friends of the leaders of the 'mobs'. Similarly Hunt, for one, was not in the least interested in piecemeal reform, parliamentary reconstruction was for him a 'sine qua non'. Thus, the efforts of any one group was unsupported by the other; Hunt's description of the Committee at Westminster makes this quite clear:

This Rump, this fag-end of a Committee of Westminster electors that was once formed to support the freedom of elections in that city, but the members of which have, since the management of it got into their hands, converted the power that they have assumed into an engine of basest corruption, and have proved themselves the most tyrannical supporters of public opinion, as well as the most determined brutal destroyers of everything like free discussion ... always acting, as they have done under the direction and immediate influence of Grand Lama, or principal juggler, Sir Francis Burdett.⁸⁴

The split was further exaggerated by the as yet still fluid composition of the working classes. While recognizable as a solid group to the remainder of society, who therefore acted upon that assumption, and even cooperating amongst themselves at times, it cannot be denied that between the skilled artisan and the unskilled labour of the unorganized masses in the new industries a certain amount of suspicion remained. The signs that this particular issue was becoming less important and that a new spirit of what the Socialists were later to term 'brotherhood' was growing, were first clearly displayed in the support given by both the public and associated

⁸⁴Hunt, II, 57-58.

industries to a striking union.⁸⁵ The notorious Six Acts, directed mainly against seditious meetings, blasphemous and seditious libels and the military training of civilians, were sufficiently severe to be successful as far as the Cabinet was concerned. The movement towards revolution was slowed but the solidification of class was accelerated through the very indiscriminatory nature of the new laws. Furthermore, the Whigs completely failed to capitalize upon the political blunders, the Government remained firm and refused to give any direct concessions.⁸⁶ A few individuals did gain stature for a stand taken, notably Hume and Ricardo; but, in general, the gibe of the Courier was probably close to the truth when the editor remarked that the only reform the majority of the opposition members wished to countenance was the displacement of the Tories.⁸⁷

In 1820, the Whigs found a more congenial and effective position from which to attack the government, Queen Caroline's trial. The London crowds were given a heroine, the Whigs an instrument out of which political capital might be safely made. But the alliance was outmoded. The exploitation of a mob could be still effective for a short time, but the use of the words 'people' and 'mob' synonymously was no longer valid. When the Bill of Pains and Penalties was withdrawn from the House of Lords the populace rejoiced in the

⁸⁵"S.C.A.M.", 279; W. Brown, T. Rowlett, and J. Thorpe, all framework knitters from Leicester, presented evidence to show that their Association had opened a public subscription when their members were on strike, 1817-1818.

⁸⁶Lord H. Holland, Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, ed., Lord Stavordale (London: 1905), 270-271.

⁸⁷Quoted by Aspinall, Lord Brougham and, 97.

failure of a monstrous plot, the Whigs exulted in the discomfiture of the Ministry, but there was no lasting co-operation. Indeed, although the final result of this singularly ill-advised proceeding was fortunate for the Tories, the Queen died, and while the episode severely damaged the reputation of the Cabinet members in the Commons and the Lords, it was the Tory party which gained the most. The lesson they learnt reinforced a tendency to lean towards that part of Burke's theory which advocated compromise and legislation modified by experience.

During the pre-1820 period, the attitude taken in respect of Carlile's 'unending' trial for libel is illuminating. The best that might be said of that man was that he stood by his personal convictions, regardless of the consequences; the worst that he was a coarse scribbling monomaniac.⁸⁸ The government could have banished him upon his second conviction as a seditious libeller. They could have brought him to court on a charge of high treason, but they were beginning to realise that severe punishment elicited a proportionate amount of sympathy, and they preferred in this instance to pretend to be dealing with a crank. These events were portentous in that they indicated a change to a more flexible approach to problems of state. It was this capacity to initiate what may be termed a holding action, to effect minor concessions judiciously in order to maintain the whole, which marked the advent of political

⁸⁸This is particularly evident if one reads Republican's monotonous rantings. Thompson describes Carlile as "indomitable but scarcely lovable." Thompson, 725.

pragmatism in the years to the First Reform Act of 1832, and which was successfully to maintain the predominately aristocratic control of power for a further eighty years.

CHAPTER III

YEARS OF INDECISION 1820-23

My L-ds and G-lt-n I grieve to say
That Poor Old Dad
Is just as ---- bad
As when I met you hear the other day.
'Tis pity that cursed State Affairs
Should take you from your pheasants and your hares..
Reform, Reform the swinish rabble cry
Meaning of course rebellion, blood and riot,
Audacious rascals! You, my Lords, and I
Know 'tis their duty to be starved in quiet.

William Hone, The Man in the Moon.

The furor raised over the Royal Coronation subsided after the Queen's death and, historians relate, England entered a period of social peace.¹ This truce, which it seems was remarkably effective, remained unbroken until the Village Labourer's Revolt in 1831. Yet such a simple approach is patently false if the facts are carefully examined. In his extremely valuable essay, Briggs hints that the term 'class'

¹The comments of A. Briggs. Age of Improvement (London: 1959), 194; Halevy, The Liberal ..., 105; and Bryant, 392-393; clearly suggest such a truce.

had established itself as a label only by 1824.² Furthermore, Weisser has suggested that events in Europe during these years provided countless examples and lessons for the working class of England.³ It seems odd too that class consciousness should have abated so suddenly after the many years of agitation. Indeed, the postulation of a hiatus in the eighteenth twenties can only be based upon the lack of agitation in the Luddite mode. But was that style perhaps outmoded by 1821? The Cato Street conspirators did not act as precursors for further radical terrorism; and the whole incident may have been an aberration which crystallized only through the work of the nefarious Oliver. A second possibility, which has been eagerly seized upon by those who believe in the social truce theory, is that the reconstitution of the two party system provided an outlet for grievance. In 1821, Lord John Russell did succeed in obtaining the disenfranchisement of Grampound; in 1822, the Grenvillites did cross the floor of the House to join the Tories; both events did excite more comment than any similar class or radical movement. However, in these instances a number of factors are stubbornly ignored. The early years of the third decade witnessed a tremendous surge in the development of successful combinations, and an equally strong rise in the literacy rate; both of which more than compensated for the imprisonment of several of the more violent

²Briggs, "The Language.....", 43.

³Weisser, 1.

members of the radical party: Hunt was languishing in gaol for his part in the St. Peter's Field meeting, Carlile was incarcerated for libel.

Cobbett's return from America, bearing the sacred bones of Paine, signalled a short-lived attack upon the aristocracy's efforts to educate the working class. He fulminated against "the hypocrisy... that is the great sin of society... society is in a queer state when the rich think that they must educate the poor in order to ensure their own safety; for this at bottom is the great motive in pushing on the education scheme."⁴ He spoke in haste, however, and Samuel Bailey (1791-1870) was nearer the truth when he noted in 1821:

Whoever has meditated on the progress of the human race cannot fail to discern that there is now a spirit of inquiry amongst men which nothing can stop, or even materially control ... Reproach and obloquy, threats and persecutions are in vain. They embitter the opposition and engender violence; but they cannot abate the keenness of research. There is a 'silent march of thought' which no power can arrest, and which it is not difficult to see will be marked by important events. Mankind was never before in the situation in which they now stand. The Press has been operating upon them for several centuries, with an influence scarcely perceptible at its commencement, but daily becoming more palpable and acquiring accelerated force. It is rousing the intellect of nations and happy will it be for them if there is no rush to interference with the natural progress of knowledge, and if by a judicious and gradual adaption of the institution to the inevitable change of opinion, they are saved from these convulsions which the pride, prejudices and obstinacy of a few may occasion on the whole.⁵

620. ⁴Cobbett's Political Register, XLIV (December 7, 1822),

⁵Quoted by Wickwar, 246.

The 'spirit of inquiry' was awakened by literature of any sort. The number of evangelical tracts printed was invariably greater than that of radical newspapers.⁶ Somerville, whose courtmarshal was to be a source of fear to the oligarchy, reports that his father, a working man, had spent half a week's wages for the Gospel Sonnets in order that his son could have suitable reading material.⁷ The growing ability to read was to be of vast importance in the following years; riot, unthinking and unsuccessful, became replaced by union and petitions, thoughtful and extremely successful. Hunt, grandly claimed that the petitions he had organized after Waterloo had had a measure of success; the Spa Fields suppli-⁸cation had obtained "thousands of pounds in Admiralty droits" for the poor; similarly, a resolution at a meeting in Bath was supposed to have caused Lord Camden to surrender "thirty-five thousand a year."⁹ These petitions were unique in one respect, many of them had been initiated by workers themselves. In the period for which Hunt speaks, this method had, however, been overshadowed by the working class's propensity for riot, although its comparative success augured

⁶ Nevertheless, it was also true that the circulation of the unstamped radical press far outstripped that of the evangelical tracts which may not have been read even once. R. K. Webb, 27-28.

⁷ Somerville, 144.

⁸ The Spa Fields meeting was, in fact, divided into two parts. The first was addressed by a number of fiery Spenceans who succeeded in persuading some members of the crowd to riot and loot a gunsmith's shop. The second part was addressed by Hunt after the departure of the mob and resulted in the petition of which he was so proud.

⁹ Hunt, III, 432.

well for the future. By 1824, the operatives had adopted the middle class weapon of petition unreservedly and were to adapt it for their own purposes.

There could not be a sudden transformation of technique. In 1823, The Times contained a report of an incident in East Anglia:

The spirit of machine breaking is again apparently reviving in this part of the country; a large party assembled on the premises of George Rant Esquire, in that part of Mandham which is in Suffolk: they proceeded to dismember the machines when the constable, with a strong posse arrived and took six of the ring-leaders into custody ... Henry Howard ... a hardened old fellow, behaved with great insolence to the magistrates and the prosecution, declaring that he conceived nothing but was proper and justifiable, and that the general sense of the country was in favour of putting a final stop to machinery of every kind...¹⁰

The energies of the working men were directed more toward combination, however. Violence, the traditional ally of the lower orders, was not neglected but often used as an extension of the more serious and intelligent activity of negotiation. The extent to which combination became more popular during these years is indicated by the minutes of evidence of the 1824 Committee on Artisans and Machinery.

One notable instance of such growth after 1820, was the Shipmen's Union of Liverpool. The evidence presented before the Committee proves that the Union was very extensive and apparently possessed unlimited power. The Union was organized effectively and included almost all workers employed in the

¹⁰ The Bury Gazette, December 20, 1822; quoted by The Times, January 2, 1821.

trade in the Liverpool area. In 1821, during the month of August, the journeymen in this Union broke with a shipyard belonging to a Mr. Grayson, and refused to return to work until that gentleman had publicly apologised for an alleged discriminatory decision. He had tried for six months, thereafter, to continue his business using workers who did not belong to the Union; in most cases these men had been obtained through advertisement in other parts of England. Upon arrival, the new men were maltreated and usually driven away! Finally, Grayson was forced to move across the river and set up a new yard. These new docks were shallow and he quickly lost trade. Thus, in order to return to the old site, he made a public apology in many of the newspapers of the region.¹¹

In 1823, the Shipmen's Union again exercised its power. One of its members, Tom Jones, was fined one guinea for working too hard.¹² The masters were incensed by such manifestations of overwhelming strength and complained bitterly to the Select Committee of 1824. Unknowingly, they echoed the grievance of Cobbett, "many of my readers do not fully understand the nature of the Combination Laws ... that law ought to be understood by every man in the country."¹³

¹¹"S.C.A.M.", 195-203, evidence of ten Master Shipmen of Liverpool.

¹²Ibid., 205.

¹³Cobbett's Political Register, XLVII (August 30, 1823), 534-535.

Not every combination was as successful as that of the men of Liverpool.¹⁴ The Times included a series of articles from the Glasgow Courier on the successes and failures attendant on a strike of textile workers in that city. They indicate a surprizing spirit and boldness on the part of the workers in a time which was supposed to be one of 'social peace.' At the beginning of September 1823, the power loom weavers of Glasgow had adopted the 'pernicious principle' of dictating to the master the wages he should give, the way he should employ his men, and the persons who should be retained and employed in the factories.¹⁵ In retaliation the manufacturers hired new hands but were forced to use the cavalry and the Sheriff to ensure that the new men would not be molested. With the failure of negotiation, the ragamuffin weavers acted -- the headline "Rioting at Glasgow -- Military called out", was the result. Bands of females roamed the Gorbals, and in Hutchestown 'mobs' attacked the factories, breaking windows and yelling insults.¹⁶ The cavalry easily suppressed the demonstration but murder and general intimidation became endemic to the Glasgow area, as the Repeal of 1824 was to show.

¹⁴ However, the Sheffield Mercantile and Manufacturing Union, formed from fifteen different branches in 1822, struck 180 workers for 26 weeks when faced by a reduction in wages. At the end of this period they achieved a degree of success, the proposed $4\frac{1}{2}$ d reduction was changed to one of $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. "S.C.A.M.", 417; evidence of J. Adams, fender maker and J. Bullock, file smith.

¹⁵ The Glasgow Courier, September 8, 1823; quoted by The Times, September 13, 1823.

¹⁶ The Glasgow Courier, September 11, 1823; quoted by The Times, September 14, 1823.

The Knaresborough weaver strike was far less violent but as well organized. Unfortunately, in this dispute the operatives were opposed by employers equally determined and co-ordinated, so much so that the weavers failed to obtain any portion of their objective.¹⁷ However, the support they received from the townspeople and the surrounding area induced a certain amount of apprehension for the future by those who oppressed them. John Lang, a hatter, presented evidence to the Committee in 1824 that he had been prosecuted and imprisoned for two months in 1820 under the Combination Laws. It had been charged that he was an official in a society which had paid their strikers small sums.¹⁸ The Dewsbury General Union of Weavers and Spinners made no secret of the fact that they collected one and a half pennies per week from their members; their membership, they boasted, was over five thousand.¹⁹ Two iron masters declared under oath that men in their employ had been prevented from working by strikers from other foundries.²⁰ The evidence pertaining to the existence of active unions is overwhelming; many trades actually used the strike weapon accompanied by the release of ungovernable passion by both sides in the disputes:

When there have been combinations among your workmen have they generally carried on peaceably? ---
Not very peaceably.²¹

¹⁷The Leeds Mercury; quoted by The Times September 14, 1823.

¹⁸"S.C.A.M.", 99; evidence of J. Lang, hatter.

¹⁹Ibid., 553; evidence of J. Oates, weaver.

²⁰Ibid., 138; evidence of Mr. Walker and Mr. Yates, ironmasters.

²¹Ibid., 178; evidence of T. Martin, carpenter and builder.

This question was asked in one form or another many times and was answered in a similar vein to the example given, in almost every instance. The workers were not averse to resorting to violence, the masters were not slow in calling out the military, and often the Unions revealed alarming discipline. The manufacturers naturally feared that the nascent activity of the 1790's was at last coming to fruition.

The emotional response to the summons of combination grew from the distress in the agricultural districts and some areas of industry which had not been alleviated by the 'truce'. The question asked by an independent country member of the House as to whether the government intended to remedy, or at least improve, the unparalleled distress which so heavily pressed upon the agricultural interests, Castlereagh gave the usual reply:

... it appeared to him that the distresses did not arise from the state of the law ... there did not exist any reasonable expectation of being able to provide a remedy for evils which were dependent upon causes beyond the control of the Legislature.²²

Wages, the touchstone of unrest, rose after 1822 but before this date the low price of the necessities of life had often initiated a series of wage reductions as it was felt the worker needed less to subsist. As Cobbett noted, "the labourers were stripped of their goods; they lost their beds, their bedding, their clocks, their Sunday coats, their brass

²²Parl. Deb., New Series, IV (February 5, 1821), 361.

kettles and their beer barrels; you will see how they were impoverished and degraded".²³ The problem was so great that few parishes in England were without their beggars and poor relief families assembling in bands with violence in mind.²⁴ Revolution, as many saw, could have few fears for the man who saw inevitable ruin staring him in the face. Creevey attempted to remind the House of the fact that "an actual revolution was going on among a very great and numerous body in the country"²⁵ largely as a result of the problems which had reduced many to penury. Serjeant Onslow two years previously had been convinced that "the disposition to excite people to tumultuous meetings still existed in full force and nothing but the laws in question kept them down".²⁶ In 1821, the petitions that had been ordered to lie on the table were many, all spoke of the miserable state of the country; yet, the Ministers, supposedly men with some sources of information and, it was hoped, ability, continued to talk of the prosperous state of the country.²⁷ Although the agricultural districts received a greater portion of the attention of Parliament, Cobbett and other writers who were primarily concerned with

²³Cobbett's Political Register, XLIV (December 26, 1822), 622.

²⁴Ibid., XLIV (October 19, 1822), 167.

²⁵Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (March 7, 1823), 511.

²⁶Ibid., V (May 8, 1821), 569.

²⁷Ibid., IV (February 22, 1821), 895.

the agrarian interest, began to range beyond the bounds set by rural life. On August 23, 1823, he printed a most interesting scale of regulations which he said were typical of a cotton spinner's shop. Contained within this list were a large number of fines to which the poor operatives were subjected, often for the merest trifles and, it seemed, directed against any attempt on the part of the worker to obtain a little comfort -- to open the window, increase the light or even to keep clean.²⁸ Parliament's debates were, on the other hand, purely concerned with the operative. Western appealed for some sign that the legislature was aware of the conditions in the industrial towns, but was ignored:

... the labourer was not so well suited at the present moment as he had been when the necessaries of life had been much higher. Bread was now cheap in England and yet the tradesman was in a state of wretchedness ... the wages of the labourer had been lowered from sixteen shillings per week to nine shillings...²⁹

With reactions of this nature it was not to be unexpected therefore when the labourer turned from the guidance of Parliament and embraced new philosophies which awarded him a place in the structure of society.

Thomas Hodgskin, who was to achieve popularity and notoriety in pre-Victorian society, began to make his voice heard above the shrieks of the noise machines. On the ques-

²⁸Cobbett's Political Register, XLVII (August 30, 1823), 542.

²⁹Parl. Deb., New Series, IV (March 7, 1821), 1154.

tion of government he agreed with Bentham, asserting that it was made by the oligarchy for the preservation and defence of their own private interests against the general interest of the people.³⁰ However, he had little faith in the Benthamite solution -- the delegate, preferring to believe that men can associate to protect one another without any delegation of power. The Benefit Clubs appointed office bearers only, and did not allow them or the committee to make laws. Opinion was capable of constituting, of restraining and giving every government particular powers in proportion, as opinion varied; therefore, why cannot opinion protect property "without the intervention of an operose machine."³¹ Similarly, Hodgskin retreated from the glib middle class arguments of economists such as Ricardo, declaring that "Mr. Ricardo's doctrines are the strongest supporters I know, as far as reasoning goes, to aristocracy."³² In the final analysis, Hodgskin considered the supposed national wage of the Ricardians to amount to nothing more than "a servile custom" perpetrated by the laws of man; rent and profit were the "artificial cause" of raising prices to workmen, in accord with "man-made institutions and historical incidents".³³

³⁰ Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin, 54-55.

³¹ "Hodgskin to Place", September 17, 1820; quoted by Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin, 58.

³² Quoted by Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin, 67.

³³ Ibid., 68.

Basically the whole of Hodgskin's doctrine depends upon the surmise that it is labour which makes the soil productive. Once this is accepted, it can be seen that it is only the master-slave relationship which is the precedent for rent:

The origin of Rent which is at present paid is this. Some few men conquered others and monopolized the whole soil of the country. At first they employed and fed the slaves, and appropriated to themselves the produce of their labour. They afterwards sold or exchanged this power over their slaves to other persons who released the slaves from personal service but still compelled them to labour on the terms of the landlord. It is for a portion of this power over an already appropriated land that rent is paid in Europe.³⁴

The working-class were spell-bound by this masterly exposition of the true worth of the labourer. His statement that "the wages of labour in European society at present must be considered as the reward given by masters to slaves",³⁵ must have been as encouraging to the early labour leaders as the repeal of the Combination Acts themselves. The role given land in the production of wealth and the place given rent in the economic theory, both assigned by the middle class and the Ricardians, could be proved erroneous, at least to the satisfaction of the working class leaders. Rent and profit, by these arguments, had been indistinguishable, both results of a single historical cause, namely what in Marxian terminology may be called the separation of the worker from the means of production. With respect to education, Hodgskin

³⁴Ibid., 70.

³⁵Ibid., 72.

was as much for the isolation of the worker from the other classes of society as had been Carlile. He recognised that although the initial impetus must come from the upper orders, the control of the people's education should be in their own hands as soon as possible:

The education of a free people, like their property will always be directed more beneficially for them when it is in their own hands The workers of London should follow the example of Glasgow and found, at their own expense, a new institution.³⁶

In connection with the implementation of this proposal, Hodgskin appealed to Place for aid. But he was persuaded, against his better judgement, to open the subscription list to notable members of the London radical group, thus controverting his own argument. The result was one that might well have been expected. Dr. Birbeck and other influential supporters, in December 1823, decided to replace the organizers, Hodgskin and Robertson, of the Mechanics Institute with a paid secretary. Hodgskin, thereafter, found the control of the fledgling organization pulled gently from his grasp. In general, the Institute refrained from political involvement but did give some support to the efforts of Place to repeal the Combination Laws. However, as Cobbett recognized:

[While] an institute to get the 'Combination Laws' repealed would, I fancy, be the most advantageous that you could at this time establish, the expansion of the mind is very well, but really, the thing which presses most, at this time, is the getting of something to expand the body a little more; a little more bread, bacon and beer, and when these are secured, a

³⁶Ibid., 87. A similar rationale was used by Hodgskin to obtain funds for the Mechanics Magazine.

little expansion of the mind will do very well.³⁷

The popularity of Hodgskin increased in some quarters after his outspoken attack on government during the Spitalfield Weaver debate of 1823. These operatives had become the subject of Parliamentary wrangling as the result of a petition from the manufacturers of that district. Those worthies had entreated the House of Commons to remove the restrictions on the wages of labour "by which the operations of your petitioners are so fettered and embarrassed."³⁸ They claimed that the unique laws which permitted "incompetents" -- magistrates, the right "to fix the labour of many sorts of goods" had driven the industry into a state of penury.³⁹ Mr. Huskisson had willingly concurred with this assessment, his principles of free trade were being put to the test. On the next sitting day for the House, a counter-petition from the weavers of Spitalfield expressed "dismay and alarm" at the Bill which was to be read on May 21st, and which was designed to leave the workers unprotected. The petitioners stated that the "journeyman weavers had derived great benefit from the existing laws".⁴⁰ Hodgskin was horrified by the operatives petition, of the "insane" desire to remain a protected industry:

³⁷Cobbett's Political Register, XLVIII(November 15, 1823), 438.

³⁸Parl. Deb., New Series, IX (May 9, 1823), 146.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., IX (May 21, 1823), 378.

... legislators have always belonged to the non-labouring classes of society, and it seems bad therefore, for the poor man to have any laws of this kind emanating from them. The individuals are already too powerful for him, and a law which is and always will be, we are assured, the expression of their combined will, merely adds to their power. Even supposing that the effect of the law might be to keep wages from falling, if it be not for the interest of the labourer to work for a lower rate he must be already sadly degraded when he needs a regulation enforced by penalties on the part of his master, to prevent his injuring himself.⁴¹

The actual condition of the working man, in both industry and agriculture, and the economy in general, is a matter of conjecture, due to the variety of sources. Early in 1823, the Manchester cotton weavers complained bitterly of distress in their industry, attributing it largely to the introduction of machinery.⁴² Huskisson and Peel dismissed the plea completely, expressing the view that considering the price of provisions the weavers were able to live in comparative comfort.⁴³ The merchants of Birmingham claimed, to have appointed a committee in 1821 which, had inquired into the 'consumption of meat, beer and other necessaries' in that town as compared to the year 1818. Their findings proved to them that the consumption of such articles had markedly dropped, and that the greatest decrease had occurred among the lower classes. They further stated that agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing in the country were all in

⁴¹The Mechanics Magazine, October 4, 1823; quoted by Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin, 85.

⁴²Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (April 25, 1823), 1292.

⁴³Ibid.

a state of decay, having diminished by twenty five per cent.⁴⁴
One member of the Commons who expressed his support for this assessment, observed that if a similar survey had been conducted in Southwest Staffordshire the same conclusions would have been made.⁴⁵

From the evidence presented to Parliament it would appear that the labourer had not enjoyed the years between 1820 and 1823. Nevertheless, the Marquis of Londonderry still felt justified, in refuting the arguments proposed by the petitioners, in re-iterating the moral charge, used by his class, to the effect that:

... the wages of manufacturing labour are certainly not so high as they were during the war, a circumstance perhaps less to be regretted, as those high wages too frequently led to extravagance and idleness.⁴⁶

Such antipathetic confirmation of distress in the manufacturing districts from a government supporter coupled with the hundreds of petitions to which Gooch, an independent country gentleman, referred in his attack on the government, seem to leave no doubt as to the miserable economic condition of the country.⁴⁷
However, there is, or at least apparently is, contradictory evidence. Whitmore reports that:

⁴⁴Ibid., IV (February 8, 1821), 523-524.

⁴⁵Ibid., 525-526.

⁴⁶Ibid., VI (February 15, 1822), 354.

⁴⁷Ibid., IV (March 7, 1821), 1139-1141.

... the consumption of wheat in 1821 showed an increase to that of the preceding year, but the increase of 1822, as compared to 1821, was an advance of twenty two per cent. The great increase of consumption was owing to the advanced wages of the manufacturing classes throughout the country, indeed, in some places, the improved choice of food had almost cast brown bread, previously so much in demand among the humbler classes, out of use; and he knew some friends who in their neighbourhood in the country were unable to procure it. In Lancashire too, the oaten cake, so generally used by the people, was disappearing, and a better sort of bread substituted in its place.⁴⁸

This would appear to be in direct contradiction to some of the previous evidence; however, the fluctuations in both time and space account for many of the discrepancies. When Wallace spoke in the Commons of an increase of ten per cent in the export of cotton goods, of seventeen per cent in the export of hardware and of thirteen per cent in the export of woollens, he was not comparing the figures of 1823 with those of 1822. His speech was delivered on February 12, 1823 and the figures were those of 1822 being compared to 1821. The total exports of the former year had exceeded the total for 1820 by twenty percent.⁴⁹ It was from the latter year that the figures really dated; thus, the total exports rose from 33,534,000 £ in 1819, to 38,394,000 £ in 1820, 40,832,000 £ in 1821, 44,243,000 £ in 1822, 43,827,000 £ in 1823, and 48,730,000 £ in 1824. The only drop being between 1822 and 1823, and that a slight one. In December of 1822, the price of cereals

⁴⁸Ibid., VIII (February 26, 1823), 267.

⁴⁹Ibid., VIII (February 12, 1823), 98-104.

had begun to rise. The price of corn that had scarcely exceeded forty shillings a quarter and even fell to thirty-four shillings at the end of November, rose to forty-one shillings in January, to sixty-two shillings and sevenpence in June, and by February, 1824, had touched sixty-seven shillings and seven pence.⁵⁰ The price of cereals had therefore risen, for the first time, without injuring industry. The entire country had begun to prosper simultaneously, town and country alike:

Even the country gentlemen, the most querulous of all classes, the least accustomed to suffer and the most incapable of struggling with difficulties when difficulties presented themselves, could no longer complain.⁵¹

These figures indicate the gradual improvement in trade in which the Tories persisted in taking comfort, and from which their supporters were able to draw their incredible analogies. At the same time, the reports of distress in 1821 and 1822 were not unexpected, nor that the problems continued well into 1823. The farmers, in some areas, were partly responsible for the variations in misery. Often compelled to pay heavy poor rates during these years, the temptation to diminish the wage of the labourer was intense. The farmer who succumbed was best advised to choose a man with a family, and therefore almost certain to receive money from the parish, as his victim. This unfortunate would receive bare subsistence money from the farmer and would be forced to apply for parish relief.⁵²

⁵⁰ Mitchell, 282. The values given are the official figures of domestic exports.

⁵¹ Annual Register, 1824, 1.

⁵² Parl. Deb., New Series, V (May 24, 1821), 990.

Such practices could only result in a gradual lowering of the living standard for all and sundry.⁵³

In 1823 the Whigs pressed for a reduction in taxes, and Robinson⁵⁴ found himself in a difficult position. The agricultural situation had not improved markedly yet it was difficult to refuse the landed interest on whose behalf the Whigs now spoke. With the spirit of conciliation which by now seemed to have a permanent niche in Tory policy, he abolished a number of taxes. However, those taxes removed were on servants, gardeners, carts and horses, and obviously weighed only upon those who possessed money.⁵⁵ The main body of assessed taxes was kept, there was no relief for the poor and the consequence was to further depress the workers.

The steady improvement, through no fault of the Tories, in the economic life of the country allowed the Honourable Members to devote their time to more important topics. Morality among the lower classes had been a matter of grave concern for many years, largely as a result of the rapid growth of the 'evangelical spirit'. The Beer and Ale Bill of 1823

⁵³One of the country members, Mr. Lockhart, reported that "labourers were poaching in the open day for the purpose of being apprehended, as they preferred the support that was afforded them in gaol to the want and misery they were compelled to encounter in their own dwelling". Ibid., VI (February 18, 1822), 454-455.

⁵⁴Frederick J. Robinson (1782-1859) became the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1823, and remained in that position until the death of Liverpool in 1827. His two nicknames, "Prosperity Robinson" and "Goody Goderich" were given him by Cobbett.

⁵⁵Parl. Deb., New Series, IX (March 21, 1823), 208-212.

was introduced amid great rejoicing for the approaching regeneration of society,⁵⁶ despite the recent speech of Alderman Wood who had carefully enumerated the poverty which beset the traders and workers of London.⁵⁷ Robinson could cheerfully note the existence of savings banks for the labouring classes, an institution which was obviously unnecessary in the light of the present state of the country.⁵⁸ The great Bull Baiting and Dog Fight Debate of May became a matter of great interest to the Members of the House, if not the country at large:

Mr. Smith was happy that his Hon. Friend had introduced this subject. He hoped it would be successful because he was convinced that a bill of this nature would be advantageous to the character of the lower classes of Englishmen. The practice of bull-baiting, dog-fighting and badger-baiting, did not, whatever might be said to the contrary, add to the real courage of the Englishmen. But it tended to keep up and extend a brutal ferocity which was not advantageous to the country in any point of view.⁵⁹

The radical newspapers and journals continued to add a spark to the general movement through inflammatory prose, but they were frustrated by the activities of the 'Bridge Street Gang', a moral society which was the secular equivalent of the Vice Society.⁶⁰ The Constitutional Association, the

⁵⁶Ibid., VIII (February 28, 1823), 301-302.

⁵⁷Ibid., VIII (February 17, 1823), 125-126.

⁵⁸Ibid., VIII (February 21, 1823), 202.

⁵⁹Ibid., IX (May 21, 1823), 434.

⁶⁰Supra, 49.

formal title of the Bridge Street Gang was founded in 1820 under the highest Tory auspices. Its membership included the Duke of Wellington, some twenty other peers, nine bishops, ninety seven clergymen and nearly forty members of the House of Commons.⁶¹ It had been founded upon the assumption that there was a weakening of the bonds between the humbler ranks of society and their natural guardians and protectors. One of the major causes of the weakening was attributed to the licentious press which was under the domination of enemies of the Constitution:

The Press, that great and invaluable blessing of civilized life -- that mighty engine for diffusing the light of liberty and of the Gospel - has unhappily become, in the hands of evil men, a lever to shake the foundations of social and moral order. Its power, which within the last century has been multiplied a hundred fold, may now be almost said to reign paramount in the guidance of Public Opinion.⁶²

The paternalistic attitude which had become a characteristic of the oligarchy is expressed most succinctly by the aims of the Association. It specifically recognized that the Press was no more virulent in the eighteen twenties than it had been in former times. However, the libels of former times had been read by the higher classes who possessed the means of detecting their falsehood; whereas "those of the present time are exclusively read by the lower orders who are destitute of all means of arriving at the truth". Furthermore, the present

⁶¹Wickwar, 183.

⁶²Part of the manifesto issued by the Association at its inception. Quoted by Wickwar, 181.

were solely concerned with the dethronement of the King and the poisoning of religion.⁶³ The Constitutional Association, while inspiring fear through its unlimited purse, met unexpected obstacles in the obstinacy of grand and petty juries. As it was predominantly Tory, the Whigs constantly attacked it,⁶⁴ and many had forgotten or never experienced the terror of the French Revolution. The activities of the Association were shortlived largely through the efforts of Carlile and his family. Although many of his relatives and friends were imprisoned and his stock confiscated, the shop managed to remain in business, using every prosecution as free publicity. Faced by apparent failure, many of the Associations supporters became disillusioned and refrained from adding to the funds; similarly, many of the members of the legal profession disliked the use of their courts for religious and political propaganda. As a result the Association died in 1822; the Vice Society continued the attack but by 1825 the practice of private prosecution had ended.

A further bar to publication was "Castlereagh's Law". This infamous statute was the fourth article of the Six Acts and imposed a new six penny tax on virtually all newspapers.⁶⁵

⁶³"Cato to the People of England", New Times, January 5, 1821, quoted by Wickwar, 183.

⁶⁴Henry Brougham, for one, launched a number of very virulent attacks upon the Association; for example: Parl. Deb. New Series, V (May 30, 1821), 1046-1053.

⁶⁵Article four reads: "...ten days after the passing of this Act all pamphlets and Papers containing any Public News, intelligence or occurrences (sic), or any Remarks or Observations thereon, or upon any Matter in Church or State, printed in any part of the United Kingdom for sale, or published periodically, or in Parts or Numbers, at intervals not exceeding twenty six days between the publication of any two such Pamphlets, where any of the said Pamphlets, Parts or Numbers, shall not exceed two Sheets, or shall be published for sale for a less sum than sixpence exclusive of the Duty by the Act imposed thereon, shall be deemed and taken to be Newspapers within the latent and Meaning of the Act. 38 George III, of the two Acts 55 George III and of Act 56 George III.

It was left to Hetherington a few years later to dispute this imposition. For the time the Republican still bravely declared, "society like the human body, has a continuous tendency to corruption unless it be placed on a self-reforming basis ... there is nothing like revolution to remove deep corruption";⁶⁶ and the Penny Politician carried the motto, "Let's die like Men and not be sold like Slaves",⁶⁷ but gradually the fires of revolution were being dampened and there was an increasingly insistent call to passive resistance, to the use of radical breakfast powder⁶⁸ and other minor acts of anti-social behaviour. The Government reacted as vigorously to this latter call to 'revolutionary activity' as any other. In the House of Lords there was a careful debate on the extent to which the vendors of such powder should be prosecuted, as were they not defrauding the revenue office by avoiding the legitimate taxes on coffee?⁶⁹ Many of the more radical pamphlets now distributed, were pirated versions of Southey's Wat Tyler and Shelley's Queen Mab. In effect, this is itself a mark of respect to the increasing sophistication of the lower classes, they were no longer satisfied with mere oratory.

The Government press, the Tory New Times, and Courier, and the Whig Morning Chronicle, continued to pour odium on the names of Hone, Carlile, Cobbett and other radical leaders,

⁶⁶Republican, II (February 11, 1820), 121.

⁶⁷Quoted by Wickwar, 56.

⁶⁸Radical breakfast powder consisted of peas, beans and roasted corn which served as coffee.

⁶⁹Parl. Deb., New Series, VI (March 8, 1822), 992.

bemoaning the fact that the labourer "whose understanding barely enables him to understand the difference between a potato and a cabbage" was being exploited.⁷⁰ The circulation of these newspapers continued to be low, however; the population of 1821 was over fourteen million yet only half a million copies were sold in any given week.⁷¹ The size of these official newspapers had remained small while the cost was high. Four pages of advertisements, London and foreign reports and some gossip cost sevenpence. A ten pounds householder would have to pay ten pounds a year to have his own copy of his newspaper every day. The newspapers were unable to survive without the income derived from advertisements. When The Times was removed from the government's list of sympathetic newspapers because of its editorial condemnation of the Peterloo 'massacre', it ceased to receive government advertisement.⁷² This virtually forced the newspaper to become a supporter of public opinion in order that it could increase its circulation; its severe criticism of the government's handling of the Spanish problem is an example.

Irrespective of the fortunes of the various branches of the newspaper industry, Parliament was developing an immense respect for the force of opinion; "the modern practice

⁷⁰New Times, January 5, 1821, quoted by Wickwar, 181.

⁷¹"Accounts and Papers" (1821) Parliamentary Papers (1827), House of Commons, XIV, 41.

⁷²The Times, May 31, 1821.

of publishing parliamentary debates by subjecting men to the influence of public opinion has done much towards a practical reform [of Parliament]" remarked Colbourne.⁷³ Members began to ask "what force now remained to be employed against the strength of public opinion".⁷⁴ Sir Edward Hyde noted that Fox had once remarked, "Give the country publicity ... and an excellent House of Commons might be formed out of the first five hundred gentlemen who happened to pass in St. James Street on any given day".⁷⁵ The problem of opinion had already been faced however, at least in a modified form. The cry for reform had been muted by the Napoleonic War, but it had rung out with even greater clarity in the period after Waterloo. The working class radicals, supported by many of the middle class, repeatedly raised the question in the House of Commons through actual member's questions or petitions. As the demands increased in intensity, the government became uneasy:

Can we resist, I mean not next session or the session after that, but can we resist for seven years Reform in Parliament? Will not -- remote as is the source -- will not recent events in Spain diminish the probability of such resistance.⁷⁶

The agricultural distress added yet another ally to the cause of reform. The country gentlemen found themselves thwarted in their hopes of relief from the agricultural de-

⁷³Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (April 21, 1823), 1148-1149.

⁷⁴Ibid., VIII (April 24, 1823), 1272.

⁷⁵Ibid., 1279.

⁷⁶"Robert Peel to Croker", March 2, 1821. The Correspondence and Diaries of J. W. Croker, ed. L. J. Jennings (3 vols., London: 1884), I, 170.

pression by Huskisson's pursuit of Ricardian economic theory. As a result they concluded that a reform of the rotten borough system, the source of Tory strength, might be in their interest. It had been in 1820 when Lord John Russell introduced his motion for the disenfranchisement of Grampound and the transference of its two seats to Leeds.⁷⁷ It was a modest proposal of moderate reform but included a dangerous principle as far as the Tories were concerned, the recognition of the new manufacturing towns. A compromise was forced and the seats were allotted to the enormous county of Yorkshire; the bias against the enfranchisement of the masses was not endangered; not an unexpected conclusion if Baring's views are taken as representative of many in the House of Commons:

... irrespective of corruption at Grampound, the two broad electoral districts of Westminster and Southwark were of such a character as no person stood a chance of success as a popular candidate unless he used language which he would be ashamed to use, in talking on the same subjects, not only in the society of gentlemen but among Englishmen possessing common sense.⁷⁸

In 1822, Lord John Russell proposed, to the delight of the radicals who remained unsatisfied by mere tinkering with the existing franchise, the addition of one hundred seats to the House. He and some of the Whigs, were persuaded that the temper of the country gentlemen had reached a peak of exasperation, and would countenance a radical change. His speech

⁷⁷Parl. Deb., New Series, I (May 9 and May 19, 1823), 237 and 480 respectively.

⁷⁸Ibid., IV (March 2, 1821), 1071.

contained allusions to revolutions in the past and to a united aristocracy; it was distinctly undemocratic and was aimed solely at enhancing Whig fortunes through reform from above.⁷⁹ The question that may be raised from this evidence: why was compromise achieved on the first reform motion which involved a radical principle whereas on the second, an extension of that same principle, the motion was heavily defeated, may be answered by the mood of judicious concession to which reference has already been made.⁸⁰ Beaumont, speaking during the debate on the disenfranchisement of Grampound,⁸¹ specifically said that he was not sanguine enough to expect the Bill would satisfy the advocates of reform in general, nevertheless, he thought "it would do a great deal of good." The Honourable J. W. Ward agreed, basing his support for the measure on the grounds that it "might be adopted without the slightest disadvantage, but with a tendency to remedy a defect." Littleton felt that the idea presented was "calculated to restore to the House of Commons the confidence of the people"; and Russell in his final summation appealed to the House:

... to adopt this course of reform which was called for by all the rational, constitutional and sober friends of liberty, justice and the country as the

⁷⁹Ibid., VI (April 25, 1822), 51-88.

⁸⁰Supra, 58-59.

⁸¹The practice of disenfranchisement was not new. Cricklewood, Aylesbury and Stockdale had all lost their franchise privileges as a result of corruption. However, Grampound, while proved to be corrupt during the election of 1816 had been a model of decorum since that date. The issue of disenfranchisement was not fought solely on the basis of corruption on this occasion, and as Bathurst remarked, "was the first instance of a system of reform of transferring the elective franchise, from small boroughs to large populous parts of the country." Parl. Deb., New Series, IV (February 12, 1821), 599.

best means of guarding against the view of those who looked for reform through violence and mischief.⁸²

The reaction of the House of Lords to the Bill in the same year is also significant. Ostensibly they appeared in favour of it on the same basis as did the Commons:

... to give security to a system, it was necessary that it should be pure; and he was therefore most desirous to remove all blots and anomalies which disgraced the constitution. This, it was obvious, could only be done by timely and prudent reforms. Where, he would ask, was the point at which human institutions ought to stand still. Since the beginning of the world everything had been subject to change...⁸³

It was, however, the changes made by the Lords to which many reformers in the Commons objected. The Bill had been altered by "those unfavourable to reform", and by allocating the two Grampound seats to the county of Yorkshire, they had, protested their critics, increased "the weight of the landed interest", the Peers adding "greatly to their influence".⁸⁴ In effect, the new Act, passed by the Commons on the grounds that something was better than nothing, was a victory for conservatism and class interest through careful concession.

It is easy to exaggerate the significance of the new spirit which seemed to pervade the House in the early eighteen twenties, especially in the light of the cabinet reconstruction of 1821-1822. Yet, on questions of domestic policy there was little between Castlereagh and Canning, despite the

⁸²Ibid., 585-603.

⁸³Ibid., V (May 10, 1821), 628.

⁸⁴Ibid., V (May 30, 1821), 1043-1044.

fact that a few days after Canning's appointment a report was circulated that "the substitution of Canning for Castlereagh was equivalent to a change in government".⁸⁵ Canning and his friends had spoken in favour of the 'Six Acts', it had fallen to Castlereagh, as leader of the Commons, to pilot them through the House. Both statesmen were in favour of Catholic emancipation, although neither was willing to force the question on the King. In 1821, when the hatred of Catholics and Catholicism itself, seemed to be declining, Plunkett had introduced two measures of Catholic emancipation which passed the Lower House. The Lords had, however, rejected the Bill in accord with the King's wishes, even though The Times had written, "we doubt whether half a century from hence there will be any such person as the Pope of Rome".⁸⁶ The progressive regeneration of politics during these years has been overstressed. Peel, as leader of the reactionary Tories over the Catholic question was as liberal as Canning on other measures. The liberal Tories were as opposed to a substantial measure of parliamentary reform as were Eldon and Sidmouth. Wellington, a reactionary on most issues, advised the King to consent to Canning's appointment as Foreign Secretary in 1822, as did Bathurst and Westmoreland who were both Ultra-Tories. In the field of economic reform, Huskisson

⁸⁵November 24, 1822. Greville Memoirs, Abridged edition by R. Fulford (London: 1963), 15.

⁸⁶The Times, April 2, 1821.

and to a less extent Robinson, did introduce a number of radical measures, but in general, they were forced to compromise with their colleagues. Brougham, so hotly a radical in 1817, failed completely to see that the suicide of Castlereagh could, in any way, be significant for the House:

Who can care a farthing about it. We know the enemy is incalculably damaged enough on other issues ... He has left behind him the choice between Merry Andrew and Spinning Jenny.⁸⁷

Thus, Joseph Hume was faced, in 1822, by a relatively unchanged House from that which had condoned the Peterloo 'massacre'; nevertheless, "encouraged by several members of the House", Hume announced that he intended to secure the repeal of the Combination Laws."⁸⁸ His main hope, however, was that the spirit of conciliation had become vigorous enough to countenance further reform. The Whigs, unfortunately, were planning to embarrass Canning by lionizing him,⁸⁹ and Place was probably correct in cautioning that "Parliament was not as yet in a condition to deal properly with the subject."⁹⁰ He advised Hume to wait. Place did, however, continue to supply Hume and others with information relative to the topic of repeal; the material sent to McCulloch, the editor of the Scotsman, was to bear an excellent return in 1824.⁹¹

⁸⁷The Creevey Papers, ed. Sir H. Maxwell (2nd ed., 3 vols., London: 1906), II, 44.

⁸⁸Wallas, 206.

⁸⁹Brougham wrote that he intended "to increase... Canning's differences with his colleagues, and not to commit ourselves on points of difference with him." "Brougham to Lansdown" December, 1822; quoted by Aspinall, Lord Brougham and ..., 130.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Wallas, 206.

⁹¹Infra, 132.

At the beginning of 1823, Place could happily note that Huskisson, Wallace and Copley, the Attorney-General, were all in favour of appointing a Select Committee to investigate the Combination Laws.⁹² But, the new Session was unprepared for the motion introduced by the member for Coventry, Peter Moore, on March 3rd. He asked leave to bring in a Bill "to amend the laws of Combination against Workmen"; asserting that his measure would attempt to induce eminent artificers to return from the continent, to effect a better distribution of profit between employer and employee and to facilitate the means of securing debts and deciding suits between artificers and their employers, truly an ambitious plan.⁹³ Place reports that this "beautiful scheme of legislation, complicated and absurd", had been produced by an alliance between George White, Clerk of the Committee at the House of Commons, Gravener Henson, the radical bobbin netmaker of Nottingham, and half a dozen others including Moore.⁹⁴ The alarm created by the Bill was considerable and Moore, much to his chagrin, was persuaded to postpone further discussion until the following Session. Wortley and Huskisson tried to soothe the feelings of their "Honourable Friend" by warmly thanking him for his efforts in bringing the subject under the notice of the House; but Huskisson cuttingly derogated the terms contained in the

⁹²Wallas, 207.

⁹³Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (March 3, 1823), 366.

⁹⁴Wallas, 208.

proposed Bill:

In endeavouring to rectify it [the old law] he [Moore] had fallen into the very error he depreciated ... this one bill contained regulations so minute, so inapplicable to existing circumstances and, in many instances, so impossible to be carried into effect, that instead of having forty four Acts of Parliament to deal with, some of which had fallen into disuse, it would be found that this one bill was enough to control, embarrass and perplex the regulators of any trade or manufacture.⁹⁵

Although justified on the grounds of clarity, the very nature of the attack illustrates the dichotomy of interests which the oligarchy faced.

During 1823, others besides Place had been active outside Parliament in the same cause. Cobbett, in an open letter to Wilberforce, referred to the trial of Ryding:

... had it not been for this law [Combination] there would in all probability, never have been any of these things which finally led to Ryding's attack upon Horrocks ... The Act keeps on talking of unlawful combination, and illegal purposes, but it takes care, in the very first clause, to declare such meetings and combinations to be illegal. After this, it goes on jovially, and enacts the punishments which are to attend the commission of such illegal doings ...⁹⁶

The subject of wages was included in this argument and was resolved with typical Cobbett agrarian logic. In 1812, he remembered, a woman had seized or helped to seize, a man's potatoes in a Manchester market, to compel him to sell at a lower price than that which he was actually asking. For her

⁹⁵Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (May 27, 1823), 548-549.

⁹⁶Cobbett's Political Register, XLVII (August 30, 1823), 534.

temerity she was hanged. Cobbett then poses this question, "if it is a crime worthy of death to attempt to force potatoes from a farmer, is it a crime in the cotton spinner to attempt to prevent others from getting his labour from him at a price lower than he asks for it?"⁹⁷

A petition from Nottingham in favour of Moore's Bill, probably as a result of Henson's rather than Place's influence, deplored the low wages presently payed by employers. It carefully emphasized instances of reductions of wages for one reason or another, rather than the attempts of the workmen to obtain an increase in their earnings; a tactic which was to be followed by many of the witnesses before the Select Committee in 1824 as well as in other petitions. A second point, which had been given detailed consideration, appealed to the outraged moral sense of the Commons.

... the petitioners are decidedly of the opinion that the paying of the working class otherwise than in money, has a most mischievous tendency not only on the interests but on the morals of such persons, as it tends to make them acquainted with pawnbrokers and introduce them into ale-houses and loose company to dispose of such goods...⁹⁸

The question of combination had thus become an issue, one which would influence the remarks of any member on related subjects discussed in the House. In the debate on the Spitalfield Silk Act, Ellice proceeded to do exactly this,

⁹⁷Ibid., 535.

⁹⁸Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (March 27, 1823), 753.

asking on what possible grounds could the government conceive the freeing of the silk industry while "the combination laws were in force". Huskisson, the spokesman for the Cabinet, was compelled to agree; but, he revealed his own attitude, which from the remark in question appeared to indicate a firm decision, by continuing that as the question was so extremely complicated "it was not a fit subject for discussion but rather called for a Committee".⁹⁹ The enemies of the principle were not as easily overawed by the complexities of the situation. The coal and iron masters protested vehemently, fearing the repercussions of such a Bill.¹⁰⁰ A Bill was even drafted at the height of the Combination Laws Debate to enlarge the power of magistrates dealing with operatives:

And be it further Enacted, that if any artificer, calico printer, handicraftsman, miner, collier, keelman, pitman, glassman, potter, labourer or other person shall contract with any person or persons whatsoever, to serve him for any time or times whatsoever, and shall absent himself from his or her service before the term of the contract shall be completed, or be guilty of any other misdemeanour in the execution thereof ... lawful for any Justice of the Peace ... empowered to administer, to issue his warrant for the apprehending ... lawful for such a Justice to¹⁰¹ commit every person to the House of Correction...

The words 'any other misdemeanour' are significant. If this section meant merely the breaking of a contract, it would be of little importance; the common law effectively guarded against a disavowal of the written contract. In this case,

⁹⁹Ibid., IX (May 21st, 1823), 384.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., IX (May 27, 1823), 546-547.

¹⁰¹"Bill to enlarge the Powers of Justices in determining Complaints between Masters and Servants, and between Masters, Apprentices, Artificers and Others." (April 16, 1823). Parliamentary Papers (1823), House of Commons, II, 254-255.

however, the Bill appears to be directed against the actions of the operative as opposed to the servant, reducing the former to the status of the latter, and strengthening class lines. Although this Bill never became law it is indicative of the response of one group of society to the problem of labour. The manual weavers of Stockport represent another. Their remedy was to recommend the establishment of a minimum rate of wages, to be set by the government and reviewed periodically.¹⁰² Their petition was not received favourably. Attwood presented the 'deluded worker' thesis -- why could the labourers not see that their employers were only interested in their welfare; Phillips thundered that he had made a personal inquiry and the complaints of the weavers and spinners were greatly exaggerated:

... the cotton spinners wages were, it was true, very low, but the price of provisions was moderate and they could live comfortably on their wages...¹⁰³

This pompous man further added that he felt the restrictive combination laws should be removed; in his opinion, the sale and purchase of labour ought to be as unrestrained as the sale and produce of any commodity. What monumental arrogance! But, an interesting conclusion, indicative of the result he expected from any repeal of the laws governing combination.

In June, the Silk Act was again before the House.

¹⁰²Parl. Deb., New Series, IX (May 30, 1823), 599.

¹⁰³Ibid.

The Session of Parliament was virtually at an end, but the debate augured well for the success of the repeal movement. Ellice and Huskisson voiced their approval for a 'Committee on Combination, the latter carefully placing on record that he had already stated to Hume his intention to accede to a committee on that subject in the next Session. This was, of course, merely an elaboration of the position he had stated, on behalf of the Cabinet, in May. Hudson Gurney summed up the prevailing attitude of many of those present when he remarked:

... Make what combination laws you may, the necessity of an understanding between parties will always abrogate this in practice, and where there is a committee of 'journeymen in communication with a committee of employers with the power of mediation on contested points¹⁰⁴... they secured no unreasonable provisions...'

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., IX (June 11, 1823), 831.

CHAPTER IV

CONCESSION AND CONCILIATION

The Levelution is begun,
So I'll go home and get my gun
And shoot the Duke of Wellington.

Belper street-song.

"The labour question", wrote Gladstone in 1892, "may be said to have come into public view with the repeal, between sixty and seventy years ago, of the Combination Laws".¹ This eminent statesman would, however, have found few among the politicians who attended the Fourth Session of Parliament in 1824, who would have agreed with him. The idea itself would have seemed preposterous to men who had witnessed the riot and mayhem which seemed endemic to an industrial society. Yet the honourable members would have been mistaken; their labour question was of little importance compared to that which was to follow. The Trade Unions, which were to assume awe-inspiring power, were in the early eighteen-twenties still languishing unrecognized beneath ornate disguises. They

¹W. E. Gladstone, "The English Labourer", Weekly Star, I (February 6, 1892).

were not yet in a position to provide the schools in which the worker might learn their lessons in self-reliance and solidarity. Nevertheless, while the Unions had not yet achieved those sparkling facets which were so important to the Fabian historians of the Twentieth Century,² they had made an indelible imprint upon those in contact with them.

The majority of Members in Parliament had, by 1824, begun to 'forget' the industrial turmoil, being greatly concerned with the depressed state of agriculture, the spasmodic twitching of ambitious Whigs who sought a pattern for constitutional reform or with the Catholic question.³ Therefore, they were unprepared for the onslaught of British labour which was to strike at the foundation of their enshrined system for a few premature months of glory. It cannot, of course, be denied that Francis Place had agitated for and promoted the cause of the repeal of the "infamous acts",⁴ and many of the members would have been aware of his activities. Similarly, Moore, with the help of White and Henson, had striven to capitalize upon that campaign and had drawn the attention of Parliament to that problem.⁵ But, the two Houses

²G. D. H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class (London: 1947), 6.

³These issues were the subjects of frequent debates between 1821 and 1824. For example, on the question of agriculture: Parl. Deb., New Series, VI (March 7, 1822), 983; ibid., VIII (March 13, 1823), 539; the Whigs constantly advocated reform: Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (February 20, 1823), 172; ibid., X (March 17, 1824), 1206-1209; the Catholic question, both in Ireland and England, occupied many of the men in the Commons: Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (April 21, 1823), 1144-1147; ibid., XI (May 17, 1824), 753-790; ibid., VIII (April 17, 1823), 1076-1123.

⁴Wallas, 203.

⁵Supra, 105.

at Westminster slept, casually unreceptive to the threat posed by the industrial leviathan which moved only fitfully in restless impotence. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, his finger on the pulse of the nation, addressed the Ways and Means Committee in typically self-congratulatory terms:

... I call to witness all the members of the House who are acquainted with the conditions of the great masses of our population which are congregated in the manufacturing districts. What was the state of that population three or four years ago, when they laboured under the extreme pressure of acknowledged distress, and what is their actual condition. Where is the disquietude, the tumult, the sedition, the outrages of the period? Vanished. What have we in their place? Peace, Order, Control and Happiness.⁶

Such blindness or self deception, to the true situation to be encountered in the industrial cities, sits well with the ostrich image which so aptly personified Parliament during the period after 1815. It's spokesman, the newly omniscient Chancellor of the Exchequer Robinson, was echoed by members from all sides of the House; the oligarchy seemed bent on a policy of smug satisfaction with its efforts.⁷ Clearness of thought was largely conspicuous by its absence. While a few members on the government benches managed to follow a consistent policy of economic reform they were opposed by others within the Cabinet;⁸ from the other side of the House,

⁶Parl. Deb., New Series, VIII (February 21, 1823), 201.

⁷Ibid., IX (May 21, 1823), 396.

⁸Ibid., IX (July 16, 1823), 1530-1532. This speech by Lord Harrowby, Lord President of the Board of Trade, criticizes the whole economic program of Huskisson.

dire warnings of the coming storm were occasionally heard but usually in a setting dictated by self interest:

There was nothing to be opposed to the march of public opinion which could stop its career. The great stream of public opinion flowed on, sweeping everything along with it, and breaking down the landmarks once thought immoveable... beware of its bulk and power; or the peaceful resistance of a stream would become the madness of a torrent.⁹

Although a gradual but almost imperceptible shift had taken place within the general body of Parliamentary opinion,¹⁰ few members were actually aware of it. Virtually at the end of the Session a speaker still felt justified in remarking that it was:

... [his] belief that the hon. member and the petitioner were labouring under mental delusion. He did not know where the distress and misery of which they talked existed. For his own part, he never saw in any other country so many fit, sleek, well-clad,¹¹ and contented looking people as he saw in England.

Members of Parliament were not alone in their complacency. The more conservative, establishment journals supported their sentiments; indeed, even after the prorogement in 1824, Blackwood's Magazine persisted in propagating the tenets its contributors had suggested, describing the previous Session in outmoded rhetoric. The theme of these articles constantly averred the peace and prosperity that had descended to earth. The 'lower orders' had seen that their efforts, "only led to

⁹Ibid., VIII (April 24, 1823), 1272.

¹⁰Supra, 111-112.

¹¹Parl. Deb., New Series, IX (June 19, 1823), 1073.

ruin, their hopes were blasted ... they retired with one consent from active political life."¹² With the lower order of being accounted for, the preservation of all that was 'holy' remained to occupy the Legislature and the journals. The Speech from the Throne at the opening of the new Session in 1824 was in such a vein, repeating the familiar platitudes that had marked the Chancellor's speech in 1823. The prosperity of the country was merely an accolade to be bestowed upon the Liverpool cabinet; and, as an added blessing, the loyal support given by the House, the Whigs who had become the "eulogists of the ministers"¹³ not least, was taken to be a sign of the hand of God.¹⁴

The unceasing agitation by the county members, such as the member for Somerset, Sir Thomas Lethbridge, finally halted with an observable rise in prices in 1824.¹⁵ But the reverberations of the Spitalfield Act and Moore's abortive effort to repeal the Combination Laws, returned with greater force and meaning. This new force, in reality but a reincarnation of the energies expended by the Luddites and Blanket-

¹²D. Robinson, "The Late Session of Parliament", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XVI (July, 1824), 74. The identification of the authors of articles in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, the Quarterly Review, and the Edinburgh Review is based upon The Wellesley Index to Victorian Publications 1824-1900, ed. W. E. Houghton (Toronto: 1966).

¹³Ibid., 75.

¹⁴Parl. Deb., New Series, X (February 3, 1824), 1-5.

¹⁵Supra, 94.

eers channelled to a new direction,¹⁶ assumed menacing proportions partly through the rising prosperity of the agricultural districts. The traditional sources of authority had been able to exercise restraint in the old villages and towns through the activities of the loyal, dependable magistrates, as well as through the old master-servant relationship enforced by the gentry and nobility. Now, however, many of the newer urban areas had combustible potential in the concentration of anonymous transient workers. Local police forces did not exist; thus, in times of possible danger, the army in conjunction with the county militia was relied upon. The relaxation of many of the problems in the countryside due to the rise in prices, tended to make the militia less active and less enthusiastic. Therefore, from the standpoint of an administrator nervous about revolution; it looked like a small army posted in a huge country. In addition, to people living in Europe during these years, revolution was not an abstraction, something that occurred either in the past or to some other group of people in the present. The English as well as the Europeans had to take revolution seriously. Radical journalists were deadly serious, revolutions in Spain and Italy were always considered with the possibility of an English revolution in mind, and invariably analysed for their effects on the working class.¹⁷ The nature of revolution was

¹⁶Thompson, 512-516.

¹⁷Weisser, 128.

was considered to be so swift, so sudden, so dramatic, so contagious, so mysterious that all upheavals on the continent were believed to be portentous.¹⁸ The 'spirit of conciliation and liberality', so sneeringly spoken of by Blackwood's Magazine,¹⁹ was then, to a cabinet minister, a necessity. The combination acts were a barrier, so the economists told them,²⁰ to the fulfillment of such a spirit and the rantings of the radicals appeared to confirm this diagnosis of tension:

The Spirit of your fathers is fled -- the hand of poverty has, in conjunction with methodistic cant and chicanery, benumbed your mental and physical exertions, the broad and malignant grasp of aristocracy, extended out by a cruel and overbearing number of Employers, have acted as an opaque body, over the sun of your rights and independence - have intercepted all the cheering rays of social and domestic happiness, leaving you nothing but the winter of poverty and tyranny which has so long intervened between you and your rights.²¹

The movement for repeal had begun in a period of industrial upheaval and political repression, might it not end in an even greater cataclysm:

The shades of dear Hassell thy mates left behind thee,
Thy words will observe thy example retain.
Thy objects pursuing for well do we mind thee
T'was freedom for men thou didst strive to obtain.
The foolries of priestcraft already are dying,
The mists of delusion are rapidly flying,
And we thy companions most fervently trying

¹⁸F. O. Darvall, Popular Disturbances and Public Opinion in Regency England (London: 1934), 248.

¹⁹Blackwood's, XVI (July, 1824), 81.

²⁰Supra, 105.

²¹"Address by John Gast to the General Body of Mechanics", quoted by Hammond, The Town..., 311.

Our tyrants to crush and our rights to maintain.²²

With sentiments such as these freely expressed in many quarters, Parliament was wary at the beginning of 1824, not wishing to disturb the apparent peace and prosperity which had descended upon the English scene.

The principle of repeal, which had been generally accepted, however grudgingly, during the previous session, encouraged a general aura of satisfaction with the justice of the proposals.²³ It intimated a solution to the undefined fear inculcated into the ruling classes by the growth of the sprawling industrial districts for which an administrative system had yet to be developed. This attitude was reinforced from many influential quarters. The Established Church defended the law together with the system, unequivocally. An exposition of the Church's educational objectives plainly exhibit a desire to placate this fear:

We inculcate a strong attachment to the constitution such as it is now; we teach them to love and revere our establishments in Church and State, even with all the real and supposed imperfections; and we are far more anxious to make them good and contented citizens, than to fit them for noisy patriots, who would perhaps destroy the constitution while pretending to correct it.²⁴

²²W. V. Holmes, "Lines Written after Witnessing Richard Hassell's Funeral", quoted by the Republican, XIV (November 17, 1826), 593-594.

²³The Fabian historians have suggested otherwise; however, the bulk of the evidence seems to support the view expressed above. For an example of the Fabian conclusion with respect to the Combination Laws see: St. John Ervine, Francis Place (London: 1912).

²⁴E. W. Grinfield, A Reply to Mr. Brougham's Practical Observations upon the Education of the People, addressed to the Working Classes and their Employers: quoted by H. Brougham, "High Church Opinions on Popular Education," Edinburgh Review, XLII (April, 1825), 212.

Similarly, the need to return to a more stable society, with its fixed social strata, found expression in many articles in 1824 and 1825, indicating among other things that class had indeed become a label as suggested by Briggs,²⁵ and that this trend was depreciated:

... we think the terms of master and servant are never used, it is constantly the working classes and their employers. We conceive the idea of this is an importation from America, and we are very sure that it is a useless one. Why are the good old English words -- servants and masters, to be struck out of our language? What have they done? Whose ox have they stolen, and when have they defrauded? ... The masters and servants are converted into hostile bodies. The old feeling of reciprocal good-will and regard for each others interests are destroyed, and replaced by strife and animosity.²⁶

This lament was representative of a group in the House of Commons, those who feared the loss of the traditional concepts of status above all else. They were incapable of entertaining any idea of a labourer bound by law alone, and held the belief that a servant, to be a "good member of society", depended upon the instruction given him by his master.²⁷ Combined with the expressed views of the Church, these ideas presented a strong moralistic tone to the Commons; one that could not be disregarded by those who purported to be the friends of the repeal movement.

The paternalistic aspect of the whole tide of govern-

²⁵Supra, 77.

²⁶D. Robinson, "The Repeal of the Combination Laws", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XVIII (July, 1825), 24-25.

²⁷Ibid., 26.

ment in these years evoked equally passionate reactions in the more radical reformers. Even Cobbett, who had been outdistanced in the race to extremism, was driven to bitter invective by Parson Brereton's book, vigorously denouncing many of the views contained within it:

Your book, or pamphlet, is no more than a sort of hash of a part of the disgusting, bloody - and raw and half-cooked mess of your brother parson MALTHUS ... The taxes necessary for the purposes of the parson, have robbed and do rob, the labourers so much that they must opt from the parish or starve. You dare not push them to the latter. You would not like open rebellion. Therefore you hate the labourers. You cannot tell why; but you hate them. I will tell you why: they cause deductions from the amount of your tithes. ... You talk of idle labourers. Are they more idle, Parson, than non-resident parsons are?²⁸

The feeling of class-solidarity against 'alien' inroads was not confined to Parliament. Class feeling, often a reaction caused by fear, tended to drive the industrial and agricultural labourers closer together than they had ever previously been. There was not and could not be at this juncture of English history, a great deal of disinterested patriotism among the working classes.²⁹ Blackwood's Magazine was correct,³⁰ both the Whigs and Radicals of the Burdett ilk had espoused the program of reform and social amelioration only to betray it in times of crisis. By the eighteen twenties the Whigs had arrived at the point where they were merely

²⁸"Letter to Parson Bereton", Cobbett's Political Register, I, (June 5, 1822), 622.

²⁹Hunt, I, 545.

³⁰Supra, 117-118.

anxious to "attach numbers to property and good order".³¹ The middle class, with its "happy band" of 'radicals', had attempted to assert their claim to leadership, even organizing a journal in this year of decision to emphasize their point, propagating the opinion that it was:

... the middle class who will really approve endeavours in favour of good government, and of the happiness and intelligence of men, had to unite to bring pressure upon the aristocracy. ... Public opinion operates in various ways upon the aristocratic classes, partly by contagion, partly by conviction, and partly by intimidation: and the principal strength of that current is derived from the greatness of the mass by which it was swelled.³²

But their efforts were less than convincing and few among the radical leaders supported their stand; although instances of co-operation were not to be entirely ruled out.³³ Thus, the temper of Parliament and the people seemed inextricably bound to the idea of class; and the interpretations given by each group to the system under which they were governed, were often coloured by purely social criteria.

The time had at last arrived, believed Place, for his philosophy to be given its fullest expression. His indefatigable pedantry and proselytizing was about to reap its reward, and with the defeat of Moore, the spoils were his alone. It

³¹N. A. Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel (London: 1953), 16.

³²Westminster Review, II, pt 11 (July-October, 1824), 205.

³³An old couple were awakened early in the morning, after the passage of the Reform Act of 1832, by a servant girl shouting, "It's passed! It's passed!" Extremely annoyed the old lady called out from under the red curtains, "What's passed, you fool?" "The Reform Bill" shouted the girl, "and we're all equal now." The lower class never really escaped from the control of the middle class. The story is told by, Lady Dorothy Nevill, Leaves from the Notebooks of Lady Dorothy Nevill, ed. R. Nevill (London: 1907), 45.

was in such terms that Place must have thought when he prepared his campaign of 1824; in his private manuscripts he reveals ample evidence to suggest that he felt White, Moore and Henson were ignorant obstacles, Hume a catspaw and Huskisson is castigated as a coward.³⁴ It seemed that only Francis Place, tailor of Charing Cross, could effect the desired goal. Thus Fabians accepted this, Place's analysis of the situation, gleefully and re-iterated its thesis in countless books and pamphlets, purporting to have found a true brother in the early days of the labour movement.³⁵ Writing Place's life, Graham Wallas quoted large sections from the tailor's private papers, being content with merely an approving comment or two. Wallas made Place a pioneer of democracy. The Webbs had seen him if not as the founder of the Trade Union movement, at least as the man to whom it owed its existence. The great majority of the masses are assigned a passive role and the propertied rulers are portrayed as simple dupes. Yet upon examination, it is obvious that the tailor's highly subjective version is not the only interpretation that may be made of the evidence. Clearly Place himself had not changed his views in many years; whereas in 1814 he had been in advance of influential opinion, by 1824 he was one among many. A letter written to Hume and intended for the eyes of Huskisson, repeats the dic-

³⁴ Wallas, 208-209.

³⁵ The Hammonds, Webbs and St. John Ervine adopt this interpretation of the repeal.

tums which had been accepted in the last Session of Parliament; indeed, since the Tories of a purported more 'liberal' bent had achieved power in 1822:

The business is really very simple, and it lies in a small space. Repeal every troublesome and vexatious enactment, and enact very little in their place. Leave workmen and employers, as much as possible, at liberty to make their own bargains in their own way.³⁶

It may be argued that the tailor was here merely jogging the memory and deliberately repeating well accepted maxims in order to elicit a favourable response. If this were so, why does Place also remark that it was necessary to use Moore as the Devil Incarnate except as a measure of blackmail to convince Huskisson anew that there was an urgent need to include the question of combination within the scope of the projected committee on artisans and machinery; a committee incidently, that was apparently to be proposed by Hume with the blessing of the House.³⁷ Huskisson had, however, placed his own favourable attitude in the records of the House of Commons in 1823;³⁸ it would appear unlikely that he intended to reverse that position so soon. Similarly, the tailor's communications with various members of the Commons and with other influential figures throughout the country, contain many of the platitudes that are equally reminiscent of attitudes

³⁶Wallas, 210.

³⁷Ibid., 211.

³⁸Supra, 113.

generally expressed in 1824, "Combination will soon cease to exist ... All will be as orderly as even a Quaker could desire."³⁹ Did Place really believe that the mood of Parliament had changed so drastically in six months? Was it necessary to recirculate and re-air the old arguments for repeal to bolster the flagging confidence of the men in the Commons? It is unlikely that he could believe himself betrayed in the light of the enthusiastic response to Moore's suggestion, as exhibited in the debates that had occupied the House a few months earlier. Possibly his frantic trumpeting was to hide a certain lack of faith in his own prognostications. His undoubtedly shrewd analysis of the industrial areas might well have intimated that the expected benefits of repeal might be mere castles in the air? It is also possible that the spate of letters which issued unrelentingly from Charing Cross were essential in promoting the idea of reform in the area of industrial relations. But the question that must be asked is whether they were necessary to evoke a receptive climate in the Commons for Combination repeal, or were they part of the political soliciting that is the hallmark of a good Parliamentary lobbyist? Place's later career suggest the latter explanation is correct. In 1837 on the eve of the Chartist agitation he again re-iterated the sentiments of 1814, "if the working classes are divided and demoralized it must

³⁹ Wallas, 212.

be from ignorance, being the disappointment which tended to sour their dispositions."⁴⁰ There is no evidence that indicates that Place could have forced repeal upon a 'reluctant Parliament', or that it was even necessary. From first to last he had been against optimism and for the pedestrian and authoritarian dissemination of correct information. Knowledge, standing firmly in the way of agitation of 'pig-headed' men, was an obsession with Place. Thus, while he was necessary as an instrument, even essential, to the passage of the first repeal of the Combination Acts, he was not the driving force that swept all opposition aside; nor even the colossus that both he and his eulogists would like their readers to accept.

Where must one then look for this motivating force in the activities of 1824? The rabble-rousing Cobbett was remarkably silent on the topic during the early meetings of the Select Committee. He preferred to attack the hapless Robinson:

According to the speeches of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, we have been getting richer and richer, better and better off, but according to the notorious facts, we have been getting poorer and poorer, and worse and worse off.⁴¹

Perhaps his dislike of the Westminster group still led by Burdett and Place, overcame his avowed partiality for the emancipation of the working class. However, his importance in

⁴⁰Quoted by Thomas, 61.

⁴¹"Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer (II)", "Cobbett's Political Register, XLIX (February 24, 1824), 517.

the formation of opinion must not be forgotten:

Of the WEEKLY JOURNALISTS, Cobbett stands first in power and popularity. Certainly he has earned the latter; would that he abused the former less! We once tried to cast the Antaeus to the ground; but the earthborn rose again, and still staggers on, blind or one-eyed, to his remorseless, restless purpose -- sometimes running upon posts and pitfalls -- sometimes shaking the country to its centre.⁴²

Inestimable service was performed by this gentleman farmer; his journal's attacks upon the establishment provided a natural rallying cry for the oppressed for were they not, "the worst fed, the worst clothed, and the most miserable and deplorable creatures in the whole world."⁴³ His mode of invective could not be more than a conscious rouser; his comparison between the negro and the English worker awoke even the most quiescent labourer to activity and the more humanitarian Parliamentarians to reflection:

English labourers are now in several parts of the country, put up for sale; or rather they are put up at auction, to be let out to work, in precisely the same manner as the negroes in Virginia or Carolina. And, in some places, they are advertised in newspapers and placards. In some places they have harness put upon them.⁴⁴

By initiating such attacks, the pressure for concession in some harmless area was intensified by those who felt indicted by his pen.

⁴²W. Hazlitt, "The Periodical Press", Edinburgh Review, XXXVIII (May, 1823), 368.

⁴³Cobbett's Political Register, XLIX (March 6, 1824), 615.

⁴⁴Ibid., XLIX (March 6, 1824), 611-612.

The rest of the radical press similarly continued to exert pressure. The Government had long been afraid of a broad reading public and regarded all newspapers and journals as potential or actual incendiaries. But few opinions seemed alarming at the beginning of 1824, and the incidence of those that still appeared 'distasteful' had decreased. The radical press was less hopeless and alienated rather than discouraged however; and, therefore, they were less desperate. Even Carlile, the arch enemy of the opulent, who thoroughly believed in his messianic destiny, relented a little upon his violent campaign. He still held "I write for the poor though all of that class do not see it; I write for the poor or the rich oppressors would not persecute me",⁴⁵ but he remained incarcerated for libel and was vigorously petitioning for release. The opinions of the more moderate reformers correspondingly received greater attention with the relaxation of tension, untainted as they were by the earlier revolutionary fanaticism. It was hoped that they might suggest some new means of moderate concession:

The maxim has long been established that all government depends upon opinion ... But there is a difference between the present times and all former times; that, in former times, governments made and fashioned the opinions of their people nearly as much as they made the laws; at present, the people throughout Europe, and especially in England, form opinion to a great degree for themselves, and are every day allowing government less and less of a share in settling what they

⁴⁵Republican, XI (June 17, 1825), 246.

shall think on any subject.⁴⁶

However, at this time it was probably true that the members of the House were less dependent than the ministers who, through the revolutionary settlement of 1688-1714, were forced to please both King and Parliament. Nevertheless, Hodgskin certainly felt that each time Parliament appeared to be granting a new liberty to the British people, it was, in reality, merely fulfilling an obligation beneath pompous ceremonial that had been forced upon it by the pressure of opinion.⁴⁷ Abercromby brilliantly argued that:

When a wise and politic minister sees public opinion gather head against him, he will endeavour to conciliate it ... In a country like this, while a free press exists, no efforts on the part of government can arrest the progress of public opinion, but the doctrine of tonight is, that though there is a great mass of feeling in favour of reform, the tide, which cannot be turned, will be checked for a while by the sophisticated⁴⁸ and delusive argument of virtual representation.

Such an argument demands periodic exhibitions, where the representatives demonstrate that they have the interest of the country at heart. It is against this background that the repeal movement must be placed.

The successful presentation of the question of repeal and the growing feeling of the justice of the demands were quickly strengthened in 1824 by an article of McCulloch's

⁴⁶The Westminster Review, IV, pt 2 (July-December), 265.

⁴⁷Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin, 83.

⁴⁸Parl. Deb., New Series, X (February 26, 1824), 485.

in the Edinburgh Review.⁴⁹ The value of this authoritative defence of the principle of repeal must not be underestimated. A clear delineation of the principles involved in the Act of 1800, especially with its overtones of class distinction, persuaded many who might have wavered:

The extreme severity of the enactment must strike everyone ... Justice of the Peace belong to the order of masters; and however respectable individually, generally possess a full share of their particular feelings and prejudices. To invest two of them with the power of imprisoning workmen for three months, without the intervention of jury is certainly entrusting them with an authority very liable to be abused, and which if it is exercised at all, out to be placed in the hands of persons less likely to act under bias. It is true that the workmen can appeal to the Quarter Sessions, but as this is only an appeal from one set of justices to another it cannot be of much importance.⁵⁰

He argued that the 'Honourable Members' must be forced to see that no master will willingly consent to a rise in wages, and that the claims of a few individuals will obviously be disregarded as long as their fellow workers labour at the old rates. Without combination the worker is at the mercy of the masters; and, even with one, the labourer operates at a disadvantage owing to the superior intelligence, wealth and the fewer numbers of employers.⁵¹ In effect, the article was a statement of the evils of class tinged with overtones of Benthamism. The reader was being shown an area in which class

⁴⁹J. R. McCulloch, "Combination Laws - restraints on emigration etc." Edinburgh Review, XXXIX (January, 1824), 316-326.

⁵⁰Ibid., 316.

⁵¹Ibid., 324.

divided the nation, and an area where a remedy could be affected without injury to the traditions he might hold dear.

On February 12th, 1824, Hume introduced his motion to obtain a Select Committee on the Emigration of Artisans, the Export of Machinery and the Combination Laws.⁵² Place records that he personally felt relieved that "the matter about which so much pains had been taken, so much time, and some money also, had been spent, and which was all but set aside, was again put upon its legs."⁵³ Hume's speech, introducing his motion, was unusual in that he denied a personal interest in combination repeal. He indicated that:

... his proposition was more comprehensive than he had originally intended it to be. It had been his desire to review, in the first place, the laws preventing artisans from leaving the country; and in the second instance, to consider how far the laws restricting the export of machinery ought to be continued, modified or repealed. At the request of various members from all sides of the House, he had since agreed to a third branch of inquiry, by no means the least important: namely those statutes which interfered with contracts between masters and servants, commonly called the Combination Laws.⁵⁴

Whether these remarks were due to the subtlety of Place, Hume's own spirit, or a previously agreed compromise with Huskisson, is a matter of conjecture. Place has apparently left no record of his own attitude with respect to this extraordinary speech. However, it is perhaps significant that

⁵²Moore, who had agreed to postpone his proposals during the 1823 Session, was now persuaded to defer to Hume. In exchange he was guaranteed a seat on the Committee, a seat which he never occupied. Wallas, 213.

⁵³Wallas, 211.

⁵⁴Parl. Deb., New Series, X (February 12, 1824), 142.

Hume referred to Scarlett, a noted legal expert in the House, for confirmation of the belief that common law was sufficient to prevent 'mischievous' combination. This strongly suggests that a careful discussion had been conducted earlier and that Hume's expressed disinterest was indeed mere trumpery. The use of the term's 'master' and 'servant', parroting a Blackwood's contributor's complaint,⁵⁵ remains inexplicable except to note that Hume was still a Member of the unreformed House of Commons. Huskisson's speech, in support of the motion, serves only to illustrate the misconceptions attached to repeal that were commonly held. The President of the Board of Trade was not a good example of a Place student:

... laws against combination had tended to multiply combinationsFrom the moment those laws were made, the workmen saw the injury which they inflicted on them, and immediately began to consider by what means they could best be evaded...⁵⁶

This argument corresponds only slightly with the evidence given by Place before the Committee in subsequent weeks, and must therefore be taken as representative of Huskisson's own view of the situation.

Convinced of the inestimable service which he had rendered to the working classes, Place left, among his papers, a detailed account of the proceedings of the Select Committee. From the first day, the reader learns, Place had been summoned by Hume, who had been chosen as permanent chairman of the

⁵⁵Supra, 122.

⁵⁶Parl. Deb., New Series, X (February 12, 1824), 149.

Committee, to provide advice. Upon his recommendation, Hume had distributed a circular letter to Mayors and other officers of towns, and to many of the principal manufacturers, requesting that delegates be sent to the Committee to give evidence. Many of those sent by committees of workmen first presented themselves to Place, where he examined their case and 'coached' them:

It required great care and pains and patience not to shock their prejudices, so as to prevent their doing their duty before the Committee. They were filled with false notions, all attributing their distresses to wrong causes, which I, in this state of the business, dared not attempt to remove. Taxes, machinery, laws against combination, the will of the masters, the conduct of the magistrates, these were the fundamental causes of all their sorrows and privations. All expected a great and sudden rise in wages, when the Combination Laws should be repealed, not one of them had any idea of the connection between wages and population. I had to discuss everything with them most carefully, to arrange and prepare everything, and so completely did those things occupy my time, that for more than three months, I had hardly time for rest.⁵⁷

Each day the proceedings of the Committee were printed and, from Hume, Place obtained a copy, carefully annotating the minutes of evidence for the edification of its chairman.

Arrogantly Place believed that, "I am very certain that less pains and care would not have been sufficient to carry the business through".⁵⁸ Again, this assessment has been unquestionably accepted. Certainly, the activities of the sawyers of Liverpool could have in no way impressed the members of

⁵⁷Wallas, 212-213.

⁵⁸Ibid., 214.

the Committee favourably. Reports in The Times of violent demands for wage increases must have nullified some of the feelings of good-will with which the Committee-men were imbued.⁵⁹ Tales of 'systemmatic intimidation' and 'sanguinary, violations of the laws of the country" probably needed the full attention of the tailor in order that they might be quickly veiled by more pleasant evidence.⁶⁰ However, other factors besides the labours of Place were equally important.

1824 was a year in which the tenets of Free Trade were eloquently defended and clearly defined. Taxes of a protectionist stamp were criticized from all sides of the House. Huskisson, in a remarkable speech in defence of economic freedom, convincingly argued that the relaxation of restrictions was a greater guarantee of increased commercial enterprise than any regulation to force prices artificially upward.⁶¹ With the mood of the House so strongly in favour of regulation repeal, there can be few doubts that the Committee which 'sat upstairs' held similar sentiments. Therefore, there was probably greater sympathy for the avowed aims of Hume and Place, than the 'herculean' labours of Place would suggest. It must be noted, however, that there was a corollary to the economic principles of the Liverpool govern-

⁵⁹The Times, February 21, 1824.

⁶⁰According to Place the Committee quickly became popular among the representatives in the Commons, even amusing. Unfortunately the Minutes of Evidence contained in the Parliamentary Papers scarcely live up to this description.

⁶¹Parl. Deb., New Series, X (March 8, 1824), 800-814.

ment from which the Cabinet could not escape; a corollary, while relatively unimportant in the Spring of 1824, which became decisive in the wake of the industrial strife after the actual repeal. The problem was alluded to by Maberly, a gentleman perhaps overly concerned with "morality a most important feature of the legislation of the kingdom".⁶² He had introduced a Bill to alter the method of collecting beer and malt duties, and upon its defeat, was heavily critical of the consistency of the government:

... why he [the Chancellor of the Exchequer] ... bound to protect the interests of all the classes alike, and yet consented to the unequal duty, which pressed so heavily upon the poor for the benefit of the rich? ... The Rt. Hon. Gentleman and the colleague at his side [Huskisson] were ready to fight liberally, and in an enlightened spirit, on silks, linens and wool; but when it was suggested that they should extend the system to beer on which there existed such inequality of justice ... the landed interest would not allow them (Hear) ...⁶³

The landed interest was largely uninterested in the early efforts for the repeal of the combination laws; the intimidation and violence was not yet on a sufficiently widespread scale to recall the terror of 1819 to the landowner. He merely watched with satisfaction the steadily ascending return from agricultural produce, and the unruly urban areas were as distant from his world as they were from the farm labourer. The repeal of the law of 1800 could proceed with his blessing. The newspapers and journals emphasize this

⁶²Ibid., X (March 2, 1824), 699.

⁶³Ibid., X (March 15, 1824), 1018.

lack of concern with a singular lack of editorial comment upon the new Committee. Even The Times only speaks of the iniquities of the prohibition on the export of machinery and the emigration of artisans, ignoring the question that was at that moment engaging the greatest percentage of the Committee's time, combination.⁶⁴

The questions asked by the members of the Committee and the answers they delighted to pursue, reflect these sentiments. A recurring theme centred upon the relationship between master and man; for example, one delegate was asked, "Do you think that the Combination Laws have tended to disturb the harmony which should subsist between the workmen and their employers".⁶⁵ The nature of this question is more pertinent to the agrarian social order rather than a rapidly industrializing nation. Few of the self-made capitalists cared about their relationship with their men, except in so far as they wanted work to be completed for the lowest possible price. Similarly, the repeated interjections of members who were concerned at the low ebb of moral behaviour among the masses: "Can you state in what situation the morals of your men are?"; "what is your opinion with regard to the general state of morals amongst our workmen?;" or, "From your observa-

⁶⁴The Times, April 12, 1824.

⁶⁵"S.C.A.M.", 12, question addressed to J. Martineau, colliery engineer. For other examples see: 150, 236, and 337; questions addressed to J. Alexander, shoemaker; S. McCall, shipwright; and W. Brunton, civil engineer respectively.

tions, when men have entered into those combinations, have they not been often led to immoral results, and have not these combinations, in various instances, had a permanent influence on the characters of the men, making them more drunken, more dissolute and more idle".⁶⁶ The answers given were calculated to calm these fears. Although Article two of the Resolutions submitted at the end of the Sixth Report faithfully records the incidence of violence associated with combination,⁶⁷ there is a curious lack of interest in the tales of turbulence reported by many employers and employees who appeared before the Committee. Only on one occasion was a delegate questioned closely. John Kirwin, President of the Shipwright's Union, was cross-examined as to the extent his union used violence to further its demands. Generally his answers were unconvincing and the supposed reasons for violence proved invalid.⁶⁸ Thus, while a connection was indisputedly made between combination and violence, the members of the Committee seemed to condone it.

A comparison of answers given by delegates to similar questions reveals fundamental inconsistencies which show that they could not have been particularly apt pupils of

⁶⁶"S.C.A.M.", 459, 59 and 139. Questions put to J. Duffey, calico printer, R. Taylor, printer, and S. Walker, iron master, respectively.

⁶⁷Infra, Appendix A.

⁶⁸"S.C.A.M.", 221-228.

Place. Strikes are described by some as a consequence of impending reductions in wages;⁶⁹ others attribute it to the desire to raise wages, describing it as the ultimate trade union weapon.⁷⁰ Francis Place himself ascribed to the latter view when called personally to give evidence.⁷¹ The feared, at least by oligarchy, widespread 'class' union which might topple the establishment, was a favourite topic for questions; the answers were generally not encouraging:

I believe ... there is an evil of very formidable nature, that trades detached and not at all interested, will associate one with another, the colliers of Newcastle will assist the machine makers in Manchester; the machine makers will assist the miners in Cornwall, or the tailors in London.⁷²

The extremist wing of such a movement, of which the Blood Red Knights of Glasgow with their intimidating letters signed with a skull and cross-bones, coffin, pistols and a dagger through the heart were but one example, had their efforts taken seriously by the Committee.⁷³ Although delegates strongly denied the existence of such terror organizations, the desire to

⁶⁹Ibid., 143, 228, 275, 394 and 417. Evidence of J. Alexander, Shoemaker; J. Kirwin, shipwright; T. Rowlett, framework knitter; S. Ramsden, woollen worker; and J. Adams, fender maker, respectively.

⁷⁰Ibid., 262, 292. Evidence of H. Boyd, sawyer and G. Henson, bobbin net lace maker respectively.

⁷¹Ibid., 44.

⁷²Ibid., 364; Evidence of T. Herves, engine and machine maker.

⁷³Ibid., 492-505; evidence of H. Houldsworth, cotton manufacturer.

disband and discourage these practices formed a valid argument for the repeal of the laws which had created them! The responses to questions on Free Trade were equally mixed in support. The most eloquent appeal for repeal, on the grounds of economic freedom, which must have aroused sympathy among the members for reasons already suggested, came from the Birmingham manufacturers delegation:

Before I withdraw, I beg leave very respectfully to state to the Committee on behalf of my colleague and myself, in the name of the respectable commercial chamber which we have the honour to represent, and which its public movements has hitherto on every occasion advocated the cause of perfect freedom of trade, that its present views ... have resulted solely from a reference to that artificial and most undesirable situation in which a complicated system of very ancient growth had gradually placed us, and that the first moment in which its members see a reasonable probability of the price of food and labour returning to their natural level, and of British manufacturers being permitted to purchase the raw materials in the cheapest market, they will thankfully and gladly hail the removal of countervailing restrictions of every description.⁷⁴

The influence of which Place boasted in his papers was significant in two areas. The unanimity of many workmen in describing the beneficial effects to be derived from repeal was the more important of the two. While a few of the delegates may have been familiar with economic and philosophical theory, the majority would not have understood the principles underlying the arguments of the proponents of repeal. Yet the workers blithely 'forgot' their own inclinations,⁷⁵ and

⁷⁴Ibid., 334; evidence of T. Oastler.

⁷⁵Wallas, 213.

professed to believe that Combination would wither and die as the result of repeal.⁷⁶ In the second area of influence, there were many expressions of a desire to have summary laws to check intimidation and violence.⁷⁷ Such statements suggest external influence, few workers could have had confidence in any law whatsoever, while it was administered by the minions of their oppressors. An indirect advantage which must have impressed the members of the Committee and one that may be attributed to the influence of Place, concerned the decorum and sobriety with which the delegates of poverty and oppression presented their evidence. A pleasant experience for those who were afraid of the lower orders.

The resolutions that were presented to Parliament were equally the result of the tailor's ingenuity. The many years of fact grubbing and careful scholarship, in and around the Legislature, convinced him that "if the Bills came under discussion they would be lost."⁷⁸ Similarly, committees with so many members⁷⁹ often became deadlocked, rarely reaching agreement even upon minor points. Therefore, with the help of Hume, he produced eleven short statements of fact which would lessen the temptation to argue that beset the usual

⁷⁶"S.C.A.M.", 106, 143, 159, 375 and 624; evidence of J. Lang, hatter; J. Alexander, shoemaker; J. Watkins, hatter; W. Longson, weaver, and J. Marshal, flax-spinner respectively.

⁷⁷Ibid., 138, 183, 296, 307; evidence of S. Walker and W. Yates, iron masters; I. Seabrook, carpenter; O. Williams, woollen manufacturer and M. Farrell, Chief Constable of Dublin, respectively.

⁷⁸Wallas, 214.

⁷⁹Place reports that at its maximum the Committee consisted of forty-eight members. Wallas, 212.

form of report. There was nothing in the resolutions which might have been accused of exaggeration or falsification; indeed, they were an admirable summary of much of the evidence presented in the thirty-six days of Committee activity. If a criticism might be made, it is one which might be attached to many of the theorists of the nineteenth century. The evidence that contains the promise of a peaceful stable society was included; the human factor with its propensity to rapaciousness, on the part of both the employer and the employee, was ignored.

The translation of the Resolutions into the form of Parliamentary Bills was also finally undertaken by Place.⁸⁰ The Bills were duly presented to the House of Commons,⁸¹ and for the first time the newspapers and journals began to ask questions. The dreadful defeat of the British by the Ashanti was partially forgotten and attention could be turned to 'less important matters. The Times of June 4th, 1824, contains two items of interest: a letter and an editorial comment upon repeal. The latter had been provoked by the swiftness of the Bill's passage through the various procedural stages, and quoted extensively from the letter to show that some of the evidence presented to the Committee had been faulty, together

⁸⁰ Wallas, 215-216.

⁸¹ Infra., 148. Three Bills were drawn up, two dealing with contract and combination questions, one with the emigration of artisans. The report on the problem of machinery exports was left as a subject for a further committee.

with the reasoning behind the movement for repeal:

... the policy that would exempt them [the workers] from the Combination Laws, and leave them within the grasp of the old law against conspiracy is a policy much more grinding and severe ... [it] crushed the convicted with the heaviest and most disgraceful penalties. By the laws which it is now sought to repeal, both a milder term is applied to the offence [combination], and a more lenient treatment following conviction. Thus, by the former laws, convicted persons were liable to transportation, pillory, or to be being rendered infamous, by the latter laws, against which the cry is raised, the severest punishment (which it is true can be inflicted summarily) is an imprisonment for three months.⁸²

On the following day, The Times followed this plea for caution with a demand for the fairer treatment of the employer, categorically denying that those worthies had ever indulged in combination or unnecessarily harmed their workmen.⁸³ The tone of the newspaper was changing, probably in sympathy with the growing alarm of the 'respectable' elements of society who saw the restless surges of a class whose time was drawing nearer.

At this crucial stage, the leadership of the repeal movement was sought by Hodgskin. The arguments presented by the workers, both before their own meetings to select delegates and to the Select Committee, shocked and appalled him by their weakness. He noticed that while the Ricardians endeavoured to show that freedom of combination would not bring about either a reduction of profits or a migration of capital,

⁸²"Letter to the Editor", The Times, June 5, 1824.

⁸³The Times, June 5, 1824.

neither they, nor the workers who followed their lead, attempted to deny that the elimination of profits and the transformation into wages of the whole produce of the industries would spell ruin. To provide such a denial he proposed, in a series of lectures which were later to be later compiled into a book,⁸⁴ the Piercy Ravenstone thesis of 1821:⁸⁵

... it is difficult even for the labourers themselves to appoint with justice the social reward or wages of each individual labourer. No statesman can accomplish this, nor ought the labourers to allow any statesman to interfere with it. The labour is theirs, the produce ought to be theirs, and they alone ought to decide how much each deserves of the produce of all.⁸⁶

Thus, in his discussion of the legislation enacted in 1824, he agreed that it had been the followers of Bentham and Ricardo who had undertaken the mission of translating the aspirations and demands of the workers into precise form, but that they themselves had been driven forward by the 'proletariat' who would eventually regain control of the movement. This was, then, leadership by proxy, and subject to re-examination whenever the workers felt betrayed. In conformity with these views, the Mechanics Magazine, Hodgskin's own journal, criticized Place:

Mr. Place from whose evidence (though a friend to the cause) we anticipate but little good Depend upon it, Mechanics, should you now fail

⁸⁴T. Hodgskin, Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital (1825), (Reprinted, New York: 1963).

⁸⁵P. Ravenstone, A Few Doubts as to the Correctness of Some Opinions generally entertained on the subject of Population and Political Economy, (1821), (Reprinted, New York: 1966).

⁸⁶Hodgskin, 89.

in your endeavours to obtain the abolition of the truly obnoxious combination laws, it will be the military tailors [about whose activities the Select Committee had been informed by Place] who have undone you.⁸⁷

The whole of this argument contains the implication that perhaps the proponents of repeal were antipathetic to all the 'legal' and 'just' aspirations of the operatives. There can be little doubt that Hodgskin was right.

Parliament had been driven by public opinion, manipulated by Place and bored by Hume. But none of these activities could have succeeded without the agreement of the Honourable Members of the House. The 'esprit de corps' of the country gentlemen had precluded any investigation of the county magistrates complained Hume;⁸⁸ the oratory and direction of public opinion caused some representatives to question even the validity of freedom of expression:

... if such opinions as those promulgated by Carlile and others were disseminated with impunity, the uniformed and lower classes of society would be left without protection⁸⁹ against the basest and most mischievous schemes.

In neither instance was there a hint that compromise or concession might be affected; these were issues too close to the very edifice of the oligarchic class ethos. In the reports of the Select Committee, on the other hand, there seemed little that the Members should fear. The horrors of combin-

⁸⁷Mechanics Magazine, quoted by The Times, June 5, 1824.

⁸⁸Parl. Deb., New Series, XI (May 27, 1824), 909.

⁸⁹Ibid., XI (June 3, 1824), p. 107.

ation were, they were told, already rampant, and had been so for many years. Repeal would tend to improve the relationship between master and man; nothing would be lost and it was possible that much might be gained. Possibly an echo of the debate on the disenfranchisement of Grampound and Ward's words, "it might be adopted without the slightest disadvantage but with a tendency to remedy a defect",⁹⁰ returned with new emphasis for the House. If, as they were led to believe, the laws against combination were a hindrance, a judicious minor concession in that area might be sufficient to stay the terrible forces of violence and revolution which they naturally abhorred.

Place found little difficulty in persuading the members of the Commons to refrain from unnecessary debate or delay in the passage of the repeal Bills. Nevertheless, June 2nd, 1824, the day on which the Bills received their second reading, was an exciting one. But not from the viewpoint of combination, the distraction upon that day was the ascent of Mr. Graham by balloon immediately outside the Parliament Buildings. The fascination of the ascent was such that the Speaker of the Commons had difficulty in obtaining a quorum to permit a vote on the Bill. As soon as the Reading was given the House was adjourned. Only four days later the Bills were passed for a third time, again with little debate; Missionary Smith of Demerara was under discussion and presented a far more

⁹⁰Supra, 104.

interesting subject for debate.

In the Lords, the "half-crazy Lord Lauderdale intimated that he would oppose the Bills".⁹¹ His objection was minor, however, and Hume and Place had made such a vigorous canvas for votes that few peers had bothered to read the substance of that upon which they were to vote. With the pacifying of Lord Lauderdale, the three Acts drawn from the Select Committee's Resolutions were passed:

- (1) An Act to repeal the Laws relating to combination of workmen, and other purposes therein mentioned (5 Geo. IV, c. 95).
- (2) An Act to consolidate and amend the laws relative to the arbitration of disputes between masters and workmen (5 Geo. IV, c. 96)
- (3) An Act to repeal the laws relative to artisans going abroad (5 Geo. IV, c. 97)

Yet another triumph for Tory paternalism had been registered. However, the Members were never again to deal with Union laws in such a cavalier manner, and the long threatened assault on entrenched class was about to begin.

CHAPTER V

ATTACK AND COUNTER ATTACK

The Serpent's mailed and many-coloured skin
Shone through the plumes its coils were twined within
By many a swollen and knotted fold; and high
And far, the neck receding light and thin,
Sustained a crested head, which warily
Shifted and glanced before the Eagle's stedfast eye.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Revolt of Islam.

The 'infamous acts' had been repealed. The Quarterly Review registered the keynote in the swelling chorus of opinion by noting that with the failure of the methods of the past it "became advisable to try whether a more lenient, and liberal system might not be productive of better effects."¹ Indeed, the staid journal admitted a note of whimsy in its reflections upon the vagrancies of the lower class, "of these unions it may raise a smile to hear that the tailors ... divided into two classes, absurdly called Flints and Dungs."²

¹C. Ross, "Artisans and Machinery", Quarterly Review, XXXI (March, 1824), 392.

²Ibid., 391.

Even The Times muted its alarmed wailing against the precipitate action of the Government, and seemed willing to allow the experiment to be assayed. Yet, while the principles of moderation appeared to be gaining converts among the established classes, the lower orders were arming, changing their strategy from clandestine hypocrisy to terrifying righteousness. Quickly the workers made use of their new freedom, claiming a share in the prosperity of the country. The old demands had been given:

... a great moral effect ... it confirmed in the minds of the operatives the conviction of the justice of their cause, tardily and reluctantly, but at last fully, conceded by the Legislature. That which was morally right in 1824 must have been so, they would reason, for fifty years before ... They conceived that they had extorted from the Legislature an admission that their masters must always be their rivals, and had hitherto been their oppressors, and the combinations to raise wages, and shorten the time, or diminish the severity of labour, were not only innocent but meritorious.³

The 'bond of attachment' between rich and poor had been replaced by a 'cash nexus', Southey's hope by Carlyle's realism.⁴ The latter term became fashionable and was used effectively by Disraeli, Marx and Engels, with varying degrees of success. For a time the materialistic base of English society was held in check by paternalism, but little could arrest the accelerating course of a process which directed society to an un-

³"Nassau Senior to Lord Melbourne on Trade Combinations (1831)", S. and B. Webb, 103-104.

⁴T. Carlyle, Sign of the Times (1829); quoted by Briggs, The Language of, 47.

equivocal worship of property and capital.

The estranged operatives in associations already well organized were the first to try their new-found strength. The weavers of Glasgow, Manchester and Dublin quickly exercised their prerogative to strike.⁵ In August, the Manchester Gazette printed a report that the journeymen dyers of that city had also turned out for an advance of wages.⁶ Trades with a tradition of combination although not actively organized in 1824, reformed their societies. The Shipwright's Union of London was instituted on August 16th, 1824 by Lomax and Gast, and in a very short time had extended its interests so as to achieve a hegemony over the shipyards of Southern England.⁷ Some craftsmen were unsure, reluctant to commit themselves prematurely. The men of Hebblethwaite, a cloth business owner, were both prudent and determined. Rather than attend upon their employer personally, they left a letter demanding an advance in wages with the rest of his mail at the toll-gate. Yet, their impatience was such that they required an answer by twelve noon on the same day.⁸ The colliers of Ayrshire were sufficiently concerned over the reputation they might acquire to print a manifesto declaring to all the purity of their intentions:

⁵"Select Committee on Combination Laws" (1925), Parliamentary Papers (1825), House of Commons, Vol. IV, 499-500. In future references the abbreviation "S.C.C.L." will be used.

⁶Manchester Gazette, quoted The Times, August 11, 1825.

⁷"S.C.C.L.", 818-821; evidence of B. Lomax and J. Gast, Shipwright Union officials.

⁸Ibid., 627-628; evidence of T. Hebblethwaite, cloth factory owner.

By the exertions of a number of intelligent individuals, and the liberal policy of the present administration with regard to trading, upwards of thirty acts of Parliament, the remains of Gothic barbarism and feudal tyranny, known by the name of Combination Laws, have been swept from the Statute Book ... and that at a meeting of the operative colliers, held in Kilmarnock upon Monday, the 25th of October, 1824, twenty seven works being met, it was the opinion that it would be highly expedient to associate for the general good of the trade.⁹

Amidst the quickening pace of class organization the organs of noise began to take alarm. The problem had been voiced by The Times in the form of a question prior to the actual repeal. The editor of that newspaper had queried the validity of Place's remark that, "they [the workers] have never demanded an unreasonable sum"; rightly noting that "to suppose they will never do so however, is to suppose human nature is infallible ... does he mean to say that absolute power can only be a safe thing in the hands of the journeymen mechanics ... to what else than absolute power does combination tend?"¹⁰ The conservative Quarterly Review, so recently willing to let conciliation and concession prevail, began in 1825 to query the wisdom of its earlier remarks and propagated the pious wish that the lower orders might be taught some of the basic principles of political economy; of course in the oligarchic mould. From amused resignation the Review's editors had turned to the promotion of the idea of the "Christian workman" and the "good member of society".¹¹ The evan-

⁹"An Address to the Colliers of Ayrshire (1824)"; quoted by Arnot, 34.

¹⁰The Times, June 5, 1824.

¹¹J. Bird Sumner and J. T. Coleridge, "Mechanics Institutes and infant schools", Quarterly Review, XXXII (October, 1825) 421

gelical tradition which had been nurtured in the paternalistic system, was still strong enough to insist upon a reverence for the qualities of a good subject, member of society and husband. However, in the face of the militancy displayed by the lower orders they were forced to retreat one step further from their stand on freedom and recommend a more regimented existence for their rebellious inferiors:

There is nothing so artificial in a plan which removes a child of two or three years from its parents care and trains it after a system, and teaches it to follow a prescribed track, that the first impression is almost uniformly against them ... no one, however, will urge this who has been an eyewitness to the cheerfulness which animates these infant persons. Examination will soon prove that all compassion on that hand may be spared.¹²

The conflict that beset the opinion mongers was illustrated clearly by the Morning Chronicle. It's answer to the question that The Times had outlined, was to propose that the operatives, and the Scottish weavers in particular, would have their problems solved by a judicious thinning of their numbers. Cobbett scornfully rejected this contrived solution by examining the remarks a little more carefully. He asked how a thinning of numbers could be achieved, and arrived at the conclusion that the only practical method was a "knocking on the head" of the undesireables. It was curious, Cobbett further commented, that the Chronicle's Editor stated in the same paragraph that if the number of weavers were reduced wages would rise; thus, the price of the product must similarly

¹²Ibid., 426-427.

rise causing less sales which in turn would necessitate a reduction in wages. This Malthusian prediction of the effects of wage increases, revealed the fallacy of the original solution. Even 'knocking on the head' would fail to solve the problem of hardship and militant combination.¹³

The writers in the more influential journals were returning to the position they had held prior to 1819. However, their penchant for pointed editorial comment had a further hidden motive. In common with an increasing number of the middle and upper class, they were becoming uneasy at the signs of working class solidarity, which, when coupled with the masses' clear numerical strength, could destroy the oligarchical 'world'. Petitions for the re-enactment of the Combination Laws had been submitted to the House of Commons almost as soon as the old Acts had been repealed. Ostensibly they claimed as the basis of their plea, that the organized hierarchies that controlled segments of the nation were inimical to good order. Place was sufficiently alarmed by these early complaints that the apparent attempt on the part of the weavers of Glasgow to inaugurate a system of government in their Union provoked a series of letters, remonstrating with the Union leaders over this 'lamentable trend' toward self-government.¹⁴ The Times reported that this same

¹³Cobbett's Political Register, LI (September 25, 1824), 816.

¹⁴Wallas, 220.

Union while avowedly seeking an increase in wages, was actually intent on an increase in power. Significantly, it was to this latter aim that the newspaper took exception, although it still designated as 'monstrous' the lengths to which the masters were forced to go to combat the strike for higher wages: "arms are supplied ... nightly watches are kept, a proclamation has been issued by the Sheriff against disturbers of the peace".¹⁵ The words describe a society engaged in a civil war and not a labour dispute. Yet, the editor was far more concerned with the motivating force behind the economic problem:

... the journeymen demand no less than that the management of the mills should be lodged with the workmen -- that individual weavers should be employed or discarded -- that foremen shall be selected not according to the masters will but to theirs -- that idleness, drunkenness and unmarketable work shall be not otherwise punished than as they the drunkards themselves shall authorize.¹⁶

Such demands were, to an oligarchy of the nature that ruled England, tantamount to revolution.

Presented with these challenges to privilege, the employers in British industry were outraged and the stream of protesting petitions became a torrent. Their anger communicated itself to the remainder of their class and threats of concerted legislative action were popular. However, it was Place who took care to circulate the rumour that the laws

¹⁵The Times, December 21, 1824.

¹⁶Ibid.

against Combination were to be re-enacted in spite of the fact that "nothing indicating any such intention had transpired."¹⁷ Place justified this conduct on the grounds that it was effective in keeping the workers quiet;¹⁸ probably, he hoped to provide a period of peace during which his prediction that combination would decline might be borne out by events. Secondly, he probably divined that the mood of Parliament was changing from complacent forbearance to desperate self-preservation. It was unfortunate that the effort to slow the onslaught on entrenched capital required an even greater manifestation of control and solidarity on the part of the operatives than had hitherto been seen. The cotton spinners of Manchester wished to present their "humble and grateful thanks to that Parliament, and implored them to continue to us those blessings which their consideration and goodness have so recently bestowed upon us."¹⁹ In order to facilitate this laudable desire to indicate the 'natural' patriotism of the people, they were forced to exercise the Union's power:

In order to effect this [petition] the committees of different trades in Manchester and the neighbourhood are requested immediately to proceed in their business, and to prepare suitable addresses formed in some measure on the above basis ... we know that some of our masters are now in London and leave you to guess the object of their visit ... they assign...

¹⁷Wallas, 222-223.

¹⁸Ibid., 223.

¹⁹"A Report of the Meeting of the Weavers of Manchester", The Times, Jan. 19, 1825.

[that] we have been guilty of various excesses, nay even cruelties ... to this as a body we plead Not Guilty.... We will here advert to the charge of throwing vitriol ... and hereby offer a reward of 50£ in addition to the 100£ already offered by the police.²⁰

Discipline and organization of a high degree as well as a sense of collective self interest were necessary to implement such a plan, and even the most imbecile oligarch probably felt doubts as to the wisdom of the repeal of the previous Session.

A feeling of fellowship or brotherhood, as a modern socialist might term it, had grown concomitant with the idea of class. It posed a second threat to the established order in that it promoted a spirit which rejected any external interference with the life of the lower class. The Select Committee appointed to inquire into the conduct of workmen in 1825, was both surprized and dismayed by the testimony of Benjamin Lomax, testimony that provoked a series of shocked questions:

You are a person, according to your own account, prepared to recommend and to assist in supporting the men against the masters on any subject whatsoever? --

Without considering that the distress had been brought upon themselves by their own act, or the motives upon which the Act had been done by them? -- [Lomax] It would have been sufficient for me to have seen a man in distress, without asking how he came to that distress.²¹

William Lovett expressed similar sentiments through the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "S.C.C.L.", 819; evidence of B. Lomax.

medium of his autobiography. He described these years of early union activity as a time in which it was hoped that 'practical Christianity', through the means of the Mechanics Institutes and Combinations, would inculcate human kindness and brotherhood into their members.²²

The organization of the workers was not yet, however, as strong as the fine speeches would indicate; and they were unable to stem the spate of industrial disputes which sought to raise the general prosperity of the worker to that of the country as a whole.²³ Thus, the pressure of the employers, and especially that exerted by the ship owners,²⁴ grew and received notice in the House of Commons. Peel, the Home Secretary, was sensitive to the new forces that had been released by the repeal of the Combination Laws, and changed his attitude towards the lower class significantly in the interval between the Sessions of 1824 and 1825. In November 1824,

²²W. Lovett, Life and Struggles of William Lovett (New York: 1876), 337. Although it is dangerous to speculate upon sentiments for which there is little evidence, it is possible that the Evangelical spirit in humanitarianism had percolated, to some degree, down to the lowest class of society.

²³For example: the Glasgow weavers struck on April 5, 1825; the joiners, carpenters and paper makers of Exeter on the same day; the Framework knitters of Nottingham on April 25, 1825; the mechanics of London on June 11, 1825; there was a general trades strike in Dublin on August 10, 1825; the Sunderland seamen refused to board their ships on August 12, 1825; and the Bradford combers left their employment on August 28, 1825. Although some strikes occurred after the Act of 1825, in most cases they had been planned much earlier.

²⁴Wallas, 223.

he had written to a friend that he believed "the law with regard to combination as it at present stands, is founded upon just principles and I believe it will ultimately be as effectual as a law can be ... a conviction of uselessness of such attempts to control others will be more serviceable than the fear of punishment."²⁵ His speech of March 1825, in support of Huskisson's motion for a Select Committee, reveals a complete absence of these laudable sentiments. N. A. Gash in his book Mr. Secretary Peel, was snared by his admiration for his subject and while reporting the speech failed to realize its significance.²⁶ In the speech Peel insisted that combination was a provocation to disorder and necessitated legislation to combat its evils.²⁷ But in what way did it provoke disorder? It was the disorder of a class war, of revolutionary danger, concerned with the surplanting of one ethic by another. The disorder was not in the Luddite, Blanketeer or even Peterloo mould, it was the struggle of organization with organization. The Autumn of 1824 and the Spring of 1825 was one of the few periods in early industrial England in which machine breaking, bread riots and appeals for the reform of Parliament did not occupy the time of the operatives. Peel's support for the Huskisson

²⁵"Letter to Leonard Horner", November, 1824; quoted by N. A. Gash, Mr. Secretary Peel (London: 1961), 351.

²⁶Gash, Mr. Secretary Peel, 354.

²⁷Parl. Deb., New Series, XII (March 29, 1825), 1305-1310.

motion in fact created more possibilities for disorder, as opposed to class war, than before.

The Opposition, if it merits that name, in both Houses of Parliament was equally aware of the danger. Grey, the Whig leader, oft appealed to the middle class in order to preclude from any association between that group and the lower class.²⁸ The success achieved by this very association in 1831-1832 reveals the wisdom of the policy pursued by Grey as far as the oligarchy were concerned. Although Grey, in company with the majority in Parliament, agreed with Huskisson and Peel on such matters, he refused to give formal sanction to a coalition between the Whigs and the Tories; a move that had been bruited in order that a united front might be presented to the oligarchs' 'enemies'. His retirement in 1825, however, permitted Holland and Lansdown; neither of whom was bound by many scruples, to re-establish the spirit of the 1790's. In 1827, the Annus Mirabilis²⁹ saw their hopes crowned with success.

Place reports that both he and Hume were surprised when Huskisson introduced his motion for a "Select Committee to inquire into the effect of the Act 5 Geo. IV, c. 95 in respect to the conduct of workmen."³⁰ However, they could

²⁸C. G. Grey, The Correspondence of the Late Earl Grey with His Majesty King William IV, ed. Henry, Lord Grey (2 vols. London: 1867), I, 376.

²⁹Theodore Hook attached this description to the year by publishing a poem under that title which mocked the new coalition of Whig and Tory.

³⁰Wallas, 224.

hardly have been startled by the tone of the speech itself. Huskisson, predictably, reaffirmed his belief in Free Trade and excused his own negligence respecting the Bill of the previous Session by referring to the great pressures of his office. The structure of the speech is interesting, revealing the thought processes through which the speaker had probably progressed. The early paragraphs are concerned with numerous tales of violence and outrage, whose "tendency to proceedings destructive of property and business ... was producing the greatest mischief to all the country".³¹ The succour of capital, and the fruits of the moneyed interest which were in jeopardy, called for legislative protection even at the expense of human lives; to what other end could the threat of special powers for the Home Secretary be directed? However, Huskisson's reasoning does not end on this point. The regulations of the Union to which the colliers of Lanark and Dumbarton belonged, were read aloud by the Hon. Member together with other examples of union organization. All indicated, at least to Huskisson, "as regular a constitution as any of those which we were now almost daily reading of, as arising from the new governments that were springing up in every part of the world."³² The threat of revolution was thus held out as a spectre that was guaranteed

³¹Parl. Deb., New Series, XII (March 29, 1825), 1291.

³²Ibid., 1293.

to stampede any waverers in the House:

Why if a system of this kind was to extend itself through the 'operative' population, engaged in all the different branches of mining manufacturing, navigation and shipping in this country in what a painful situation would everybody concerned be placed.³³

Of course, Huskisson was correct. No government could tolerate a self-governing organization that placed itself outside the power of the country's laws in certain particulars; if it wished to survive unchanged! The fear of a gigantic conspiracy that might displace them from their seats of power was uppermost in the minds of the members present, for they knew that it was "an invariable principle that in all contests for all kinds of power, the most artful were those who usually obtained their object and seated themselves in the places of authority."³⁴ Huskisson was probably not unaware that the dictum applied equally to the House of Commons; only a few days previously a motion to exclude members of the Commons from voting on questions in which they had a pecuniary interest had been rejected without a division.³⁵ To redress the situation so that the oligarchical power might be perpetuated in the old way, Huskisson, the architect of Free Trade, suggested:

Under these circumstances, he must consider that

³³Ibid., 1296.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., XII (March 10, 1825), 926.

the law of which he had been speaking was not adequate to put down an evil which was increasing to such a formidable extent; not the evil of committing the other offences to which the law had so particularly adverted, but the evil of workmen being permitted to plot.³⁶

He finished on a highly significant note, "if the present prevailing misconstruction of the law should be thought by the workmen to justify their pretensions, the magistrates would give the masters their support against any such demands."³⁷ The alliance of the manufacturing and landed interests had been cemented. In the ensuing debate, Hume apparently caught unaware of Huskisson's intentions, expressed his agreement to the motion as long as fault was admitted to lay on both sides. Peel was simply happy that nothing of party or political feeling was mixed up with the discussion. Surely a significant declaration which signified the true class basis upon which the subject of combination had now been placed.

The Committee was drawn, Place relates, from gentlemen known to be inimical to the aspirations of the operatives, although Hume could not be denied a seat. Place, with his usual respect for the opinion of posterity, remarked that "neither Mr. Hume nor I expected we should be able to beat such a Committee as we did."³⁸ The skilled lobbyist, however,

³⁶Ibid., XII (March 29, 1825), 1699.

³⁷Ibid., 1300.

³⁸Wallas, 227.

did perform valuable service through his efforts in rallying the operatives and encouraging them to attend the sittings of the new Committee. Huskisson, Place believed, had been unfortunate in wording his motion "to inquire into the conduct respecting workmen", for it legally permitted every worker who so desired to appear before the Committee and submit evidence. Using the Easter recess to organize his forces, "Hume and I availed ourselves of this circumstance and were indefatigable;"³⁹ all was prepared when the Committee finally met. In addition, he had produced a pamphlet criticizing Huskisson's speech which he contrived to distribute to many members in the House. The tailor was again conscientiously fulfilling his self-appointed task. Nevertheless, neither the report nor indeed the decisions taken in the Commons depended upon his efforts; and it became clear that the Act of 1825 was not to be considered a defeat for the landed interest; nor, after the initial shock had dissipated, for the manufacturers. The Act was in fact structured to give the greatest possible license to the magistrates, the keepers of the upper class, while leaving the form of freedom to the workers.

Early in 1825, however, the Act lay in the future. The newspapers and journals anticipated the worst and devoted a great deal of their space to the castigation of the ungrateful operatives. Lending its not inconsiderable weight

³⁹Ibid.

to the cause of the masters, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, a staunch supporter of the Tory oligarchy, expressed the 'unselfish' view that "upon the industry, subordination and general good conduct of these classes [the lower], the peace, prosperity and even existence of our empire mainly depend."⁴⁰ There followed a masterly defence of ad hoc legislation which was as much an expression of class consciousness as may be found in the eighteen twenties:

The laws against combination ... were formed to remedy evils which existed, and which demanded remedying ... we are not called upon to say that they were faultless.⁴¹

While such unprovoked tampering with the venerated system of laws which governed the country was to be deplored, the real sin against society was, in the eyes of this Tory magazine, one which attacked both the landed and the manufacturing interests. The journal detested the arrogance of the servants who dared to place themselves on an equal footing with their masters or who presumed to believe that there was as much dependence on the one side as the other. It was through beliefs of this nature Robinson, the author of the article, stated that combinations of the 'worst spirit', administering their own laws without regard for the laws of the Country, "sprang up and organized themselves into a gigantic confed-

⁴⁰D. Robinson, "The Repeal of the Combination Laws", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XVIII (July, 1825), 20.

⁴¹Ibid.

eracy."⁴² This confederacy, he claimed, existed only to promote the private and personal interests of its members, "trampled upon law" and placed the masters under "a ruinous tyranny". This diatribe built fear upon fear to create the true basis of class -- hate. Above all it manifested a close affinity to the speech of Huskisson. "In times of distress", Robinson suggested, "the working orders generally became furious politicians ... it would be the most easy thing imaginable for this immense conspiracy to assume a political character".⁴³ The divine right to rule, for both the author of the article and the editor of the journal, was sacred to the master. The master had ruled for centuries and had seen to it that the wages of the labourer had not sunk below their "proper point". Indeed, "in good times many of the working men could earn as much in five working days of the week as would support their families and allow them to spend the sixth in idleness and dissipation."⁴⁴ If at times wages were low, it was due to the inability of the master to pay and not reluctance. The character of the labourer was such, on the other hand, that as soon as he had power, as in combination, he "murdered and maimed without mercy." The question of political power was the hidden motive, in the opinion of the author, for the labourer's activity:

⁴²Ibid., 24-26.

⁴³Ibid., 27.

⁴⁴Ibid., 22.

Woe to England when its labourers shall be so far independent as to be only governed by law ... it is the authority of the master which compels the servant not only to do his duty as a worker, but to do his duty as a member of society ... to this authority the working classes of Britain mainly owe their high character. Let it be destroyed -- and you will strip the worker of all his valuable qualities. The twelve hours per day of labour will dwindle down to seven or eight; the industry and activity will soon degenerate into sloth and carelessness; the skill will soon change to dissipation, and the good morals will soon become general depravity.⁴⁵

Obviously upon these grounds the worker was incapable of exercising judgement on any score; the elective franchise and power in general must be withheld. The similarity between these sentiments and those of certain racist doctrines of the twentieth century cannot be mistaken. In both cases it was suggested that education must be denied the lower class of being; the Mechanics Institutes with their free lectures which were given to the poor English worker were dangerous and an Act of Parliament was advocated to "suppress them."⁴⁶ Similarly, the confident assertion that labour had a 'proper point' in a fixed scale, of pecuniary reward, a scale which was not to be applied to the incomes of the upper class, was a class statement, as was the threat "to place them [the workers] bound hand and foot at the mercy of the masters."⁴⁷

Although the instruments of propaganda were denied the worker, he too attempted to enlist the aid of the general

⁴⁵Ibid., 26-27.

⁴⁶Ibid., 29.

⁴⁷Ibid., 31.

public. The framework knitters of Leicester printed a moving appeal describing their "wretched state of degradation and misery."⁴⁸ At a meeting of the cotton spinners in Manchester which was attended by newspaper reporters, the chairman of the meeting had attempted to demonstrate the harmlessness of the operatives by abandoning the monetary support the Union afforded the striking Glasgow weavers. He was prevented, however, by a speaker from the floor, who secured the virtual defeat of this surrender to pressure, by vividly picturing the suffering to which the weavers were subjected as a body:

See then to what miserable end we are doomed. From six years of age most of us have been dragged through dust and cotton flyings, and living the greatest part of our time in a heated and unwholesome atmosphere, suffering through the bad extremes of heat and cold, deprived from sleep from the aching of our limbs through protracted labour, and at thirty five years of age, we must come to a wretched and miserable old age, our children scarce grown up, and our means of independence through honest industry dwindled to a stand at a corner of a street, with hat in hand, soliciting the precarious charity of the listless passenger.⁴⁹

The two extremes in the social hierarchy were incapable of attaching any merit to the other's viewpoint. Suffering was discounted by the reputable journals as a cause of violence. They preferred rather to attribute all such activity to the repeal of the Combination Laws.⁵⁰ Their

⁴⁸The Times, April 28, 1825.

⁴⁹Manchester Gazette; quoted by The Times, January 19, 1825.

⁵⁰Gentleman's Magazine, XCV, pt. 1, Urban (May, 1825), 459.

rationalization for the class fear to which they had succumbed lay in the pious wish for the safety of the realm from disorder. The Times, which occasionally reported the activities of the workers sympathetically, issued a mild criticism of Huskisson's speech for a new Select Committee, but only on the basis of dilatoriness in government. Its personal vendetta with the Tory administration ⁵¹ had not prevented the 'popular' newspaper from supporting its class, "Not, be it observed, that we are friends to combination .. far be that wickedness from us!"⁵² Nevertheless, Barnes the editor, was sufficiently perceptive, as compared to many of his contemporaries, to add a few observations which seemed to have escaped Hume and Place:

... we suspect MR. HUSKISSON errs, if he supposes that the House can at this waning period of the Session too -- undo the mischief of the fatal Act of last year. The poison of that Act will rankle long in the blood of the operative manufacturer, for how can he be induced to believe that he has not an indefensible right to that which has been formally conceded him by law? the agricultural gentlemen now see the state of the manufacturing districts as described by MR. HUSKISSON. that they are on the brink of commotion. Do they mean to bring matters to that crisis which MR. HUSKISSON describes as probable --- that is to drive the manufacturing population upon the point of the bayonet.⁵³

Although Doherty, the leader of the Lancashire spinners, probably exaggerated, there must have been many who agreed

⁵¹Supra, 101.

⁵²The Times, May 31, 1825.

⁵³Ibid., March 31, 1825.

with his prognosis that a re-enactment of the old laws would result in a widespread revolutionary movement.⁵⁴ Place, at this time, was inclined to support the views expressed in the Westminster Review; a view that attributed a "lack of foresight and blindness caused by desire" to the ruling oligarchy, which would undoubtedly destroy any possibility of a sensible solution to the problem of combination.⁵⁵ Despite this pessimistic attitude on the part of the self-professed champions of the lower class, the debates in the House of Commons reflect the demand, so ably articulated by The Times, for moderate protection against trade unions rather than an unthinking reversion to the Act of 1800.⁵⁶

The conflict of interest around which the theoretical discussion of class revolved may best be examined through the use of the Shipbuilders and Shipwrights Union as a case study. This Union had been formed on August 16th, 1824 under regular organization. Nathaniel Clark was appointed Chairman and John Gast Secretary. It was from this date of organization that many masters felt could be traced the systematic and unjustifiable aggression which beset the shipyards of Southern England. The legitimate authority of the masters, the free-will of the workmen, and the demands

⁵⁴Thompson, 520.

⁵⁵Westminster Review, II, pt. 11, (July-December, 1824), 275.

⁵⁶The Times, May 4, 1825.

⁵⁷Ibid., September 30, 1825.

for exorbitant increases in wages were issues upon which the Union attempted to attack the owners. Moreover, these attacks were under the direction of a committee which exercised power beyond that which the owners considered reasonable:

These men the committee members have become great public functionaries; they had been lifted into higher authority by the combination; they found it a much finer thing to receive pay and enjoy power as Kings and Viceroyes ...⁵⁷

The paternalistic bent of some owners fostered the probably erroneous belief that:

... a large portion of workmen are heartily tired of the contest, and a considerable number see and deplore the folly and madness of the course the men are pursuing; but having committed themselves, they are restrained from withdrawing by the description of moral intimidation which induces many who have no dread of personal violence to shrink from the odium and contempt which is heaped upon those who venture to think and act for themselves.⁵⁸

There is no evidence from the workmen themselves that such a condition infected the men in any unions. It would also seem incompatible with yet another complaint of the masters that their erstwhile servants were being indoctrinated with the psuedo-philosophy embraced by their Union; a philosophy which was rapidly giving the workers a moral basis for their demands:

... the worst possible spirit prevails; every social and moral tie is severed, gloomy and rancorous discontent is everywhere manifested; capitalists are

⁵⁷Ibid., September 30, 1825.

⁵⁸Ibid., September 20, 1825.

represented as useless drones, and a settled conviction is entertained that the time is rapidly approaching when the labouring class will claim by force a large participation in the good things of life, which have been too long withheld from them by the cupidity of the higher ranks.⁵⁹

It was obvious that the shipowners were unable to reach any consistent conclusions which might have explained the action of their men. On the one hand they could not believe that the workers willingly acted against the owners; on the other, the evidence of solidarity and 'class' consciousness was too complete to be ignored. For the moment they speculated in bemused confusion.

The theorist largely responsible for this bewilderment, and the propagation of ideas which the operatives found congenial, was again Thomas Hodgskin. His earlier attempts to provide the silk weavers of Spitalfield with dignity and the witnesses before the Select Committee of 1824 with assurance, were now given greater publicity through the publication of his book. Labour defended against the Claims of Capital. With the basic premise "masters ... are labourers", forcefully reiterated, he was able to demolish effectively one of the central points of the capitalist argument; namely, that combination would ultimately drive capital from the country, paralyse enterprise and destroy public industry. The masters had used this surmise to provide what they believed was an irrefutable argument for the re-enactment of the

⁵⁹Ibid.,

Combination Laws; Hodgskin's attack quickly dispelled this illusion:

If by combining the journeymen were to drive the masters, who are a useful class of labourer out of the country, if they were to force abroad the skill and ingenuity which contrive, severing them from the hands that execute, they would do themselves, the remaining inhabitants, considerable mischief. If on the contrary, by combining they merely incapacitate the masters from obtaining any profit on their capital, and merely prevent them from completing the engagements they have contracted with the capitalist, they will do themselves and the country incalculable service. They may reduce or destroy altogether the profit of the idle capitalist ... they will increase prodigiously the productive power of the country by increasing the number of skilled labourers. The most successful and widest-spread possible combination to obtain an augmentation of wages reduce the incomes of those who live on profit and interest, and have no just claim by custom to any share of the natural produce.⁶⁰

The last phrase in the paragraph could have been uttered, in different context, by Malthus himself. Combination, for Hodgskin, was, thus, a means by which the wealth of the country might be increased; for the oligarchy, combination connotated disaster.

For the operatives, however, the most important question was still to be resolved, that of responsibility. The masters of the nation, paternalistic in their solicitous concern for the errant workmen, had assumed the garb of holiness, purporting to protect the labourer from his own folly. In any guise, this was an insidious claim in that it attempted to promote self-doubt and to undermine the recent

⁶⁰ Hodgskin, 91.

and fragile class consciousness which the workers had so laboriously acquired. Hodgskin abhorred any suspicion of dependence and vigorously questioned the right of the Legislature to interfere in matters pertaining to industrial disputes, except in so far as the legislators acted "as a farmer watches over the health of his cattle, and a West Indian planter looks after the negroes because they are his property".⁶¹ He freely admitted that the lament of the Blackwood's contributor who sought the suppression of the Mechanics Institutes, was legitimate. They were designed to subvert the authority of the master, and embraced objectives adopted to combat the spirit of dependence by teaching moral as well as social science. It was hoped by the organizers, that eventually the workers would grasp the principles under which society had been constructed so that they might effect radical change. Change that could not be promoted or destroyed by violence; change, that would become permanent.⁶² He further elaborated that the 'revolution' in society would be based upon 'class':

The interests of the different classes of labourer who are now first beginning to think and act as a body, in opposition to the other classes among whom ... the produce of the earth is divided ... they will assuredly ascertain why they only of all classes in society have always been involved in poverty and distress. They will not stop short of any ultimate truth, and they have experienced too

⁶¹ Ibid., 93.

⁶² Ibid., 100.

few of the advantages of society to make them feel satisfied with the present order of things. The mind is rather invigorated rather than enfeebled by the labour of hands, and they will carry forward the investigation, undelayed by the pedantry of learning and undiverted by the fastidiousness of taste.⁶³

The assault upon their society was seen with horror, by the rulers of the realm, to be directed against its very roots. Combination for higher wages was mere trumpery, designed to obscure the true revolutionary nature of an attack upon entrenched privilege:

The contest now appears to lie between master and journeyman, or between one species of labour and another, but it will soon be displayed in its proper characters, and will stand confessed a war of honest industry against idle profligacy which has so long ruled the affairs of the political world with undisputed authority -- which has, for its own security, added honour and political power to wealth and has conjoined exclusion and disgrace with the poverty it has inflicted on the labourer.⁶⁴

A close and intimate union was Hodgskin's solution, a method by which moral and numerical strength could be united to form an irresistible force. Huskisson's speech was not a collection of "inferences as a three parts crazy creature might have drawn from his bewildered imagination" despite the obloquy poured by Place.⁶⁵ It merely followed the stated views of the most influential writer among the manufacturing population; a view that appeared to be accepted by many of

⁶³Ibid., 101.

⁶⁴Ibid., 103.

⁶⁵Wallas, 224.

the larger unions. The oligarchy were justifiably alarmed by the contention that law derived its effectiveness from the sanctity with which it was regarded by the bulk of the populace, for it carried the threat that a loss of reverence for society in its contemporary form would provoke insurrection. Similarly, they were told to be wary of legislation planned specifically to enhance the claims of class and capital,⁶⁶ and the oligarchy saw that the workers were confident that this too would cause a contest between capital and labour. While Hodgskin's panacea was, predictably, to allow labour to possess and enjoy the whole of its produce⁶⁷, an unacceptable solution as far as the oligarchy were concerned, the legislators could not ignore its possible ramifications.

The Select Committee met and was instantly besieged by operatives who, after presenting petitions from their respective organizations, waited upon it in the corridors. In the Commons, itself, business proceeded with its usual dedication. The mood of the members had however, changed unmistakably; Hobhouse, in presenting a petition from the weavers of Rochdale, made no attempt to add his hope to that of the operatives that the repeal of the previous Session might not be rescinded.⁶⁸ Gooch, the influential, indepen-

⁶⁶Hodgskin, 105.

⁶⁷Ibid., 109.

⁶⁸Parl. Deb., New Series, XIII (April 25, 1825, 149.

dent country gentleman made the confident assertion that:

... the workmen in the city received greater wages than they ever did. They had nothing to do on Sundays and Mondays but to stuff themselves with roast beef and plum pudding. The talk of poverty in the city was mere humbug.⁶⁹

Such unthinking rhetoric could be expected from a representative of the landed interest and aroused no more surprise than did Huskisson's warning that "peace and prosperity" was threatened by combination. However, General Gascoyne, the popular radical member for Liverpool, must have caused a great deal of disillusionment among his supporters. In his speech, he began by extolling the virtues of the Shipwright's Union in Liverpool, detailing the numerous alms houses the Union had built and of its great efforts to keep its members off poor relief, a great virtue in the eyes of an oligarch. He added, however, the corollary that he trusted, "due care would be taken not to interfere with them unnecessarily".⁷⁰ This request constituted an important concession to class; it implies that some changes were essential. Sir Matthew White Ridley, a member who had taken the Chair of the Select Committee upstairs for a few days and was thus an important spokesman for the purposes of this paper, had on May 3rd, 1825 already expressed some definite opinions:

He wished the labouring classes to get as much

⁶⁹Ibid., 154.

⁷⁰Ibid., XIII (May 3, 1825), 357.

as they could by fair and proper means. They had the right to do so. It was fair that individual labour should have its just reward. But it was another thing if the workmen proceeded by threats and intimidation. It was a very different matter if they stepped out of their sphere.⁷¹

As many speakers commented, combination was prejudicial to the interests of the masters if it continued to follow a 'class' course. It might even destroy the whole manufacturing interest of the country.⁷²

The members of the Select Committee returned to the Commons disgusted by the evidence which indicated that the workmen were a class "to which information had made its way".⁷³ They were further alienated by the very manner of the operatives which indicated that they deemed it praiseworthy "to join in combined bodies, and to direct the masters how to carry on their trades".⁷⁴ Denman, the legal expert upon whom Hume had relied in 1824, was forced to defend himself vigorously and fruitlessly sought to win some support. Scarlett, who had been less vocal in 1824 and whose legal reputation had been enhanced by the errors of Denman, unerringly pointed out the problem of which the cabinet were all too keenly aware; that was the fact that the common law, upon which the repeal had been based, could not be applied

⁷¹Ibid., 359; the underlining is mine.

⁷²Note the examples of such an attitude contained in the speeches of Lord Hamilton and Mr. Baring. Ibid., 360-361.

⁷³Ibid., XIII (May 4, 1825), 368.

⁷⁴Ibid.

until a breach of the peace had been actually committed.⁷⁵ Therefore, disorder caused by the lower class had been effectively placed on the same level as similar acts by the other classes of society. That this was inconceivable to the rulers of Britain needed no elaboration. Their attitude was repeatedly demonstrated. Peel urged the House to refrain from overzealous behaviour with respect to the Cotton Mills Bill. He based this appeal on the grounds that if the regulations were too severe the masters might refuse to employ any children, thus destroying part of the Country's economy.⁷⁶ This argument was a classic instance of class arrogance.

The year of 1825 was devoted to a large extent to a discussion of the various aspects of combination. The most blatant and possibly frankest expression of the sympathy of Parliament for the manufacturing interest, was displayed in the debate upon the Registry of Ships Bill. Huskisson introduced the subject by repeating his version of the 'deplorable' combinations among shipwrights, carpenters and other journeymen in the shipyards which had prevented any ship being repaired on the Thames. He recognised that this was a dispute between interests yet calmly proposed that the government interfere. His purported reason for this drastic step was that the combinations with their delegates, permanent 'sit-

⁷⁵Ibid., 364-367.

⁷⁶Ibid., XIII (May 6, 1825), 422.

tings' and militant behaviour needed to be shown "the folly of their proceedings". The Government, to facilitate this awakening, proposed to relax the venerable Navigation Laws and allow ship owners to repair their ships in foreign ports. By this action he expected "the excited feeling and perverted disposition of the mechanics of the country" would vanish. A second, 'class', measure was proposed even more at variance with established practice. In future, at least until the sailors realized their error, foreign sailors were to be permitted to serve on British ships, for this purpose special powers were to be assigned to the Privy Council. Astoundingly, there were no objections reported from any side of the House, Hume even concurred with the principle of the Bill.⁷⁷ The surrender of government to class pressure dealt a deadly blow to the principle of combination and union. The relaxation of one of the bulwarks of the British mercantile system for any purpose would have been normally deplored by many Members in the House, on the grounds that it struck at the roots of British greatness. That there was no opposition to the measure is thus doubly significant.

While the temper of Parliament augured ill for the working class, the Committee that was to decide its immediate future met 'up the stairs'. The Select Committee had for its regular chairman Thomas Wallace, Master of the Mint, who, in

⁷⁷Ibid., XIII (June 23, 1825), 1347-1349.

the words of Place, would attend "to no suggestion from those who opposed him".⁷⁸ The proceedings of the Committee were intended to be secret, and the fact that the tailor managed to obtain a copy of the minutes of evidence every day caused great alarm and anger.⁷⁹ Unlike the Committee of the previous Session, no attempt was made to examine all those who appeared before the Committee room. Indeed, many were excluded; Place reports that delegates from "Birmingham, Sheffield and several other places" were ignored; certainly there was no evidence of such persons contained in the printed reports.⁸⁰ The intrepid campaigner of Charing Cross complained bitterly that many who were accused of "the grossest crimes" were refused a hearing, while the masters who were the accusers received every facility, including travelling expenses and payment for time lost.⁸¹ Nevertheless, there is little evidence that the most antagonistic from among the masters to the claims of their labourers were actually in attendance. The Committee member's questions, were, in the majority of cases, more prejudicial to the workers defence than was the evidence with which the Committee was presented.

⁷⁸Ibid., XIII (June 23, 1825), 1347-1349.

⁷⁹"S.C.C.L.", 947, 950 and 984; questions addressed to H. Nesbitt, seaman; H. Woodruffe, seaman; and J. Beveridge, a clerk of the Seamen's Standard Union, respectively. Place secretly enjoyed the Committee's discomfiture; Wallas, 233.

⁸⁰Wallas, 231.

⁸¹Ibid., 232.

The first gentleman examined, submitted evidence of combination in which amicable settlement with the employers had been achieved.⁸² Even the second witness, one of the hated Dublin masters who had imputed the worst crimes in Dublin to the efforts of pernicious combinations, only repeated the charges that had been made in 1824, although with new examples. All trades in the city, the Committee were told, existed in association. Yet, exactly the same situation prevailed prior to 1824, repeal had had a minimal effect on the industries of that city. The reaction to these tales was, however, vastly different from 1824. The Committee pursued the reports of violence with great vigor, seizing upon every instance of murder to indict all workmen:

What were the circumstances attending the murder?-...
Has any person been taken up and punished for the murder?-...
How was it known by whom he was murdered?-....
Was he a peaceable man?-....
Have the police been able to apprehend the persons murdering him?-...
Was the murder accompanied by robbery of the person?-
There has been no individual injured by attacks of this kind since October last?-...⁸³

The pursuit of this line of questioning is reminiscent of the cross-examinations by prosecuting attorneys and not of an impartial committee. There almost seems to be a note of regret in the last question that murder had not been more regu-

⁸²"S.C.C.L.", 570; evidence of J. Biddle, colliery engineer.

⁸³Ibid., 578; questions addressed to R. Hutton, coach-maker of Dublin.

lar. The punishment that might be inflicted under the Repeal of 1824 was similarly subject to derisive comment; a member asked, "Are you aware that by an Act of last Session, persons entering into combination by threats ... are punishable by two months imprisonment only."⁸⁴ To each witness similar questions were addressed, nominally in obedience with Huskisson's motion to investigate the "conduct of workmen". Nevertheless, the tone of the questions and the unyielding refusal to accept answers which denied the charges of violence were indicative of the Committee's own bias in the matter.⁸⁵

The Committee did not allow itself, however, to become completely pre-occupied with violence; an inquiry into the possibility of general combination, although not specifically covered by the terms of Huskisson's motion, became equally important. The investigation was initiated on the second day when a routine examination of the Chief Constable of Dublin, dealing with the extent of violence to be found in that city, elicited the answer, "the general spirit of combination is greater but the number of outrages have been less since repeal".⁸⁶ This response confirmed the worst suspi-

⁸⁴Ibid., 585; the underlining is mine.

⁸⁵Ibid., 640, 655, 697, 728, 813, 821, and 895; questions addressed to H. Guthrie, colliery owner; W. Richmond, shipowner; J. Swift, journeyman weaver; T. Worsley, cotton spinner; W. Evans, shipwright; B. Lomax, shipwright; and W. Robinson, deputy sheriff of Lanarkshire, respectively.

⁸⁶Ibid., 587-588; evidence of M. Farrell, Chief Constable of Dublin.

cions of the leaders of the House; the lower orders had indeed become a separate class if, in Dublin of all cities, the Unions were able to control the normal Irish propensity for riot and disorder. When the opportunity occurred the Committee attempted to verify their fears by harshly questioning Robert Ryan, a cooper and the Secretary of his Union, striving to establish fixed rules and a form of government detrimental to the country as a whole.⁸⁷ With the same objective in view, Ryan was asked, "would you work with a man who would not pay his monthly allowance to the Union?" Wearily, the beleaguered man replied, "I have answered that question so many times; I cannot refuse to work with anyone, nor do not."⁸⁸ Throughout this cross-examination, the Committee were obviously determined to disbelieve any evidence that might prove favourable to the workers, and Ryan's protests of innocence were contemptuously ignored.

In addition to the Committee's interest in the form of organization, there was a great deal of apprehension expressed over the apparent claim of the militant lower class for equality of treatment under the law, and the recognition of their equivalent status with respect to the masters. Richards, ingenuously answered a question, "he [their em-

⁸⁷Ibid., 616; questions addressed to R. Ryan, cooper.

⁸⁸Ibid., 617; evidence of R. Ryan, cooper.

ployer] asked whether the committee of journeymen had the power to alter the price of the article and we told him we conceived we had".⁸⁹ Similarly, Amos Cowsgill, President of the Fancy Union, was asked, "Do you consider that the masters and men are now on the same footing"; Cowsgill's answer was in the affirmative.⁹⁰ That the Committee had no intention of accepting evidence favourable to combination even from masters, was illustrated fully by the exchange of question and answer with a small Thames ship-yard owner. Despite the latter's repeated denials, he was successively asked:

What have they [the Unions] endeavoured to impose on you in the management of your yard? -- ...

What have they attempted to make you do in the conduct of your yard? -- ...

How have they interfered in the management of your yard? -- ...

You dismissed him a worker not in the Union in consequence of a threat? -- ...

Do you pretend to say you did not acquiesce in his selection [as foreman] because you knew him to be a delegate of the Union? ...⁹¹

The cause of the workers was not improved by the appearance of Lomax and Gast before the Committee. Both were officials of the Shipwright's Union to which the members of both the Committee and Parliament felt particular dislike.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ibid., 622; evidence of J. Richards, cooper.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 712; evidence of A. Cowsgill, President of the Fancy Union.

⁹¹ Ibid., 813-816; questions addressed to T. Snook, ship-yard owner.

⁹² The ship owners cabal formed a powerful pressure group in the lobby of the Commons.

The evidence they presented was of a nature that would alarm even the most liberal oligarch. Lomax freely admitted an extensive organizing journey in South Eastern England:

The object of that was to point out to the parties to whom I went, the necessity of forming themselves into a Union for the purpose of relieving themselves and so forth ... I went to Lynn in Norfolk, to Yarmouth in Norfolk, to Woodbridge, to Ipswich, to Harwich, to Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight and Southampton, to recommend that they should form a Union.⁹³

Gast had journeyed to Bristol with a similar purpose in mind, sending delegates from that sea port to various harbours throughout Western England.⁹⁴ Before the Committee could fully absorb this frank exposition of the 'criminal' conspiracies which beset them, Lomax added that his Union also claimed the right of general interference between the masters and any members of the Union.⁹⁵ Such testimony confirmed the need for legislation to curb these associations, at least as far as the members of the Committee were concerned, for the new and daring demands indicated a class that was becoming far too well "organized and determined."⁹⁶

The report prepared by the Select Committee was printed on May 16th, and subsequently circulated to all members of Parliament. If Place is to be believed when he

⁹³"S.C.C.L.", 821; evidence of B. Lomax, Shipwright Union official.

⁹⁴Ibid., 826; evidence of J. Gast, Shipwright Union official.

⁹⁵Ibid., 836; evidence of B. Lomax.

⁹⁶Ibid., 898; questions addressed to W. Robinson, deputy sheriff of Lanarkshire.

attributed delay and controversy to an involved and detailed report,⁹⁷ the statement submitted to the House of Commons must have been a problem for Chairman Wallace, indeed. However, from the early date of printing it was obvious that no such detailed wrangling had occurred. If the complex list is taken as the consensus of opinion among the members, its contents indicated a meritorious display of unanimity, unanimity which must have been built from a common base. That this base was class was clearly delineated by the tone of the conclusions; certainly the first complaint was one of class encroachment:

It appeared that in almost every part of the United Kingdom in which large bodies of men are collected for the purpose of carrying on any craft or manufacture, combination exists in more or less objectionable form ... since the passing of the Act of the last Session ... it had taken a more open and avowed character.⁹⁸

The objects of these combinations were seen by the Committee to originate in the desire to assume a modicum of power over the masters, through the use of intimidation and techniques which are known today by the term 'closed shop'.⁹⁹ The Committee was forced to admit that instances of violence had occurred in societies before they became legalized as combinations, however they did not, and herein lay the crux

⁹⁷Supra, 142.

⁹⁸"S.C.C.L.", 501. For the text of the report and conclusions of this Committee, Supra, Appendix B.

⁹⁹Ibid., 502.

of the complaint, have "the extended objects and systematic combination". The permanent committees were to be no longer regarded as figments of the overwrought imaginations of masters, but were to be taken as government which regarded itself 'above the law' on some matters. The evidence with which the Committee had been presented indicated, its members thought, "a struggle for power", a struggle which for the moment lay between master and man at work,¹⁰⁰ but which might soon extend to the realm of national government. Even in Ireland and Scotland, where violence and intimidation was assigned a recognized role in any organization, the report felt 'compelled' to add that the new combinations possessed a spirit and numerical strength which permitted a greater degree of "openness and audacity" than ever before.¹⁰¹

Despite the note of fear which had been allowed to enter the submitted resolutions, the Select Committee did not condemn the report of 1824 which had recommended the repeal of the Combination Laws. The old problems were irrelevant, the challenge of insurgent class was the issue to which Parliament should now address itself:

If the spirit of dictation now manifested be suffered to prevail among the working classes, if the application of capital is to be controlled, and the principle of free labour totally subverted, every part of the process of trade and manufacture be subjected to the judgement of committee and every im-

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 505.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 506.

provement by machinery or otherwise, admitted or rejected at their discretion, the necessary consequence must be, that capital will be withdrawn or transported, the source of every branch of our industry gradually cut off and the whole labouring population of the country consigned to misery and distress, which it is the tendency of the ill-advised combination in which so great a portion of it is implicated, rapidly and inevitably to produce ... At the moment the greater part of the manufacturing labour of the kingdom may be said to be under the domination of the committees of the respective Associations which are themselves under the influence of agitators, who despise and govern it according to their will, deriving power and importance from the discussion the forment ...¹⁰²

The language used in this paragraph is very similar to that which might have been employed by a schoolmaster when scolding an erring pupil. In effect, the resolution insisted that government and industry be left to the 'natural aristocracy' lest the common 'herd' destroy themselves. Forgiveness would be afforded the lower class only if they removed themselves from the clutches of those who were agitators.

The majority of the self-appointed guardians remained silent. Hume struck one of the few blows for the operatives during the debate upon the new combination Act, by observing that not one of the abuses of which the masters had so loudly complained had been proved. Nor, he added, had that which had caused combinations, the corn laws, been discussed; the "combination of land owners" was too sacred a topic.¹⁰³ How-

¹⁰²Ibid., 509-510.

¹⁰³Parl. Deb., New Series, XIII (June 27, 1825), 1405.

ever, Hume received no help from the avowed radical members of the House, and Wallace's submission that the Act of the previous Session went "too far" in giving the workmen the power of "exercising compulsion", probably represented the feelings of the majority of those present.¹⁰⁴ While the Whigs and Radicals in the House of Commons maintained a discreet silence, the Tory spokesmen resorted to acrimony:

No terms either as to truth or decency of language, to the utmost extent which ingenuity could use, so as not to reprehended by the Speaker, were spared. Wallace gave loose to invective and was disgracefully abusive. Huskisson became enraged and grossly insulted Sir Francis Burdett and Mr. Hobhouse. Mr. Peel stuck at nothing, he lied so openly, so grossly, so repeatedly, and so shamelessly, as even to astonish me, who always thought, and still do think him, a pitiful, shuffling fellow.¹⁰⁵

Despite his disgust with the manner in which the new Bill was maneuvered through the Commons, Place did not actually object to its provisions. The Bill, which was to become Act 6 Geo. IV c. 129, contained no single measure that would alter the existing system significantly. The main changes gave summary jurisdiction to magistrates, abolished the necessity of previous information and permitted conviction of 'conspirators' on the testimony of one witness only. Workers were, however, permitted to meet for the purpose of regulating wages and the hours of labour. Unfortunately, as any

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 1403.

¹⁰⁵Wallas, 236. Unfortunately, there is no report of a debate in the style suggested by Place in either Hansard's Parliamentary Debates or the reports from Parliament contained in The Times.

Union official knew, the means of exercising this privilege had been virtually eliminated through the Act's clauses which outlawed persuasion and the regular collection of subscriptions. With the Unions shorn of their power, the oligarchy felt safe in authorizing the continuation of some of the advantages obtained through the Act of 1824. Place was, however, critical of the fact that the words "common law" had been omitted from the fourth and fifth clauses; an omission which encouraged vagueness and therefore made it possible for men to be indicted for conspiracy when they had committed no crime. Similarly, he expressed regret when he realised that the operatives were to be prevented from discussing any matter, at their meeting, other than wage regulation.¹⁰⁶ His optimism, and confidence that combination would die a natural death, remained high. In 1829, he observed that power looms were still occasionally broken, that the Spitalfield weavers had destroyed silk in the looms, but "the extent of the mischief has been comparatively small as compared to former times, and a few years will probably put an end to everything of this kind".¹⁰⁷ The tailor's delusions prevented him from understanding the class nature of the Act of 1825. Hume, perhaps only half-consciously, had been closer to a realization of the Act's importance when he noted that "out

¹⁰⁶Wallas, 238-239. For a list of the activities made legal offences by the Act see: Supra, 201-202.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 239-240.

of ninety-seven petitions that had been presented to the House on the subject of Combination Laws, there were seven from masters".¹⁰⁸ A day later he had the wit to recognise that it was in the interest of the labourer "to submit to the legislature".¹⁰⁹ In both comments it was obvious for whom Parliament was administered. Peel was sufficiently aware of the dangers inherent in the situation to deny publicly that the government was antipathetic to the workers. He even used the political expedient of quoting a letter from Hume, wherein that gentleman had remarked, "if the operatives do not act with more temperance, moderation and prudence than they are now doing, the Legislature will be obliged to retrace its steps and to adopt measures to check unreasonable proceedings".¹¹⁰ The need to discredit Hume in the eyes of the workers and thus deprive them of a champion within the Commons, was obviously considered by the Tory cabinet to be a necessity.

In the House of Lords, the Bill received quick approval, although an amendment to the effect that the right of appeal to the Quarter Sessions be included was accepted.¹¹¹ Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister, made the interesting confession he "had not been aware of its [the

¹⁰⁸Parl. Deb., New Series, XIII (June 29, 1825), 1458.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., XIII (June 30, 1825), 1463.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Wallas, 239, n. 1. The admendment was reputedly proposed by Lord Rosslyn at the behest of Place.

Repeal of 1824] extent, and did not, until it came into operation, know its provisions".¹¹² As The Times noted it was curious that so many of those who had played an active part in securing the repeal of 1824 were unaware of the principal features of their own measure.¹¹³ Yet why, if this were the case, had the Act been passed and upon what principle had the Act of 1825 been constructed; an Act which "differed very little from Mr. Hume's Act [1824]".¹¹⁴ It has been suggested that apathy was largely responsible, in conjunction, of course, with the political machinations of Place and the long oratory of Hume. However, the political and economic principles embraced by the ruling class should not be forgotten. The principles of free trade in goods and negotiation between master and servant had permitted the passage of the Act of 1824, and those same principles had not been discarded by 1825. Catholic emancipation was freely discussed, the Corn Laws, although debated in other context, were under review and the imminent if short-lived union of Whig and Tory was eagerly anticipated. But, in 1824, the cabinet had been swept along by the course of reform too quickly and reaction had swiftly settled in. To compensate, the investigation into the effects of combination was renewed and an Act was passed, which was more in keeping with the general

¹¹²Parl. Deb., New Series, XIII (July 4, 1825), 1478.

¹¹³The Times, May 5, 1825.

¹¹⁴Wallas, 238.

principles of the 'liberal' Tory government.

The key to the subtle change may be found in the powers given to the magistrate under the second Act. In this Act of 1825 the magistrate was given the freedom to convict upon the evidence of one witness only. Admittedly, evidence was notoriously hard to collect upon the subject; but the magistrate, who could be a master in a trade other than that which was under judgement, could determine the credibility of the witness without recourse to any other opinion. The workers had always been naturally suspicious of the impartiality of the vendors of justice, agreeing with Cobbett that "it was notorious that they are paid for everything they do".¹¹⁵ Their suspicions were soon found to be justified. In one blatant instance of class bias the Recorder at the London Sessions spoke of combination in the following terms:

In a country like England, the offence was not to be tolerated. Since the Session before last, the Legislature had very properly made an enactment which would render the common law of the land operative, so as, if possible, to annihilate the evil, or at least to stem its torrent ... He adverted to the occurrence of an illegal conspiracy which had taken place fifteen years ago at The Times office, and which had been prosecuted with great spirit by the conductor of that journal. The offenders were convicted, and a severe punishment very properly followed, but a punishment more severe than just. The consequences were extremely beneficial, as conspiracies of this nature were afterwards for a long time prevented.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵Cobbett's Political Register, L1 (September 4, 1825), 580.

¹¹⁶"Address by the Recorder to the Grand Jury at the London Sessions"; quoted by The Times, September 15, 1825.

The last sentence certainly carried the suggestion that judges in the future would do well to follow the example set in 1810.

The masters were disappointed in the new regulations, complete control over the workers had not been returned to them and they resented the loss in power; a loss which had been, in part, transferred to the landed aristocracy by virtue of that group's control of the antiquated legal system. The newspapers also lamented that the coursing spirit of combination continued unabated, and would reduce the value of property so that it would not be "worth so much as five years purchase from the date at which we are writing".¹¹⁷ The Times which was now, according to Place, tied to the shipping interest,¹¹⁸ made a vindictive attack upon the Thames shipwrights, notably Gast, whom they accused of exercising too great a degree of power:

There seems to be no variety of mischievous perverseness left untried ... they act not merely in their own sphere, but make incursions into other trades, and like despots of a higher denomination bring complex forces to bear upon a single victim ... the Unions are overgrowing the country everywhere. There are Unions of Unions, or delegates from each Trade to constitute a general assembly representing all ... This is a gigantic image of the Corresponding Societies which menaced the country once before with destruction. It is an instrument, first for a monopoly of labour - next for a monopoly of power. It is a war of numbers against property - of rapacity

¹¹⁷The Times, September 30, 1825.

¹¹⁸Wallas, 222.

against industry ... we are menaced by a fourth estate within the realm and one capable of devouring all the others through whose indifference and supineness it will have grown up. Let the Ministers look well to it. A servile war brought Rome herself, and in the days of her energy, to the brink of destruction.¹¹⁹

The supposition that the 'fourth estate' contemplated an assumption of political power filled the editor of The Times with fear:

The first fruit as we have already said, of such a confederacy when once effected, is a monopoly of labour against the capitalist; and it is a monopoly of which the bond must ever be personal intimidation exercised by the chiefs upon their subjects. The second fruit of it is political power, to be arrayed against authority of the State; the inevitable tendency of which is always a demonstration of physical force and numbers. It is therefore essential to the peace of the kingdom that some means should be found of quelling these dangers in their infancy.¹²⁰

Basically, the anxiety over the safety of oligarchic power began to torment the middle class as much as the aristocrats; for not only did that group, as a class, aspire to the control of government but the lower orders, if unchecked, might quickly dominate industry, "It is not safe for the workmen of different trades at opposite extremities of the kingdom to unite their forces against the masters of each manufacturing town".¹²¹ The awareness of a need for a mutual alliance against the workers became stronger with the passing of each day.

¹¹⁹The Times, September 30, 1825.

¹²⁰Ibid., October 1, 1825.

¹²¹Ibid., October 11, 1825.

The apprehensions voiced by the newspapers seemed to be justified by the activity of the Unions which appeared to be ignoring the new law. The Sheffield Iris reported that the apprentices of some ships in northern ports refused to work unless they were given tea and sugar with their meals.¹²² In Nottingham, the bobbin makers voted unanimously that the masters be presented with a resolution to the effect that an eight hour day would be considered "highly expedient".¹²³ At Barnsley, the weavers adopted a singularly effective weapon of factory strikes where they 'turned out' at only one manufactory at a time.¹²⁴ In both Dublin and Glasgow the trades continued their "bloody ways".¹²⁵ The Bradford combers and weavers sought higher wages and used intimidations to effect their goals.¹²⁶ The Trades Newspaper and Mechanics Weekly Journal began publication and had the audacity to adopt the motto, "They helped everyone his neighbour and everyone said to his brother, Be of Good Cheer".¹²⁷ The government, evidently determined to force

¹²²Sheffield Iris, July 12, 1825; quoted by S. and B. Webb, 109.

¹²³Nottingham Mercury; quoted by The Times, September 28, 1825.

¹²⁴Leeds Intelligencer; quoted by The Times, October 1, 1825.

¹²⁵Dublin Evening Post and Glasgow Chronicle; quoted by The Times, August 2nd, 1825 and August 10th, 1825 respectively.

¹²⁶Leeds Intelligencer; quoted by The Times, August 28, 1825.

¹²⁷Quoted by S. and B. Webb, 111.

the cessation of such defiance, extended the provisions of the Registry Act and opened the Royal Dockyards to private shipping.¹²⁸ The Sunderland seamen and dock workers anticipated such action and began a violent recruiting campaign which cost many lives. As The Times despairingly asked, would the servants never desist from their madness.¹²⁹

The Union activity was, however, in the form of death throes rather than youthful exuberance. The Times, although a little prematurely, joyfully announced the impending collapse of its particular enemy, the Thames Shipwright Union, and ardently expressed the hope that the masters would now require on the grounds of unquestionable right, "the unqualified submission of all the shipwrights".¹³⁰ To facilitate this happy event, the editor printed a manifesto, designed in part to refute the allegations and repair the damage caused by McCulloch's article of January 1824. It quixotically recognised the right of workmen to free negotiation in respect of wages, but based its objection to further freedom on the grounds of inequality. The worker, "the skill of whose head and the dexterity of whose hands, constitute his only property", was far more independent of chance and circumstance, The Times maintained, than the employer who had

¹²⁸The Times, October 1, 1825.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

the capital invested in machinery, buildings and trade outlets. The worker could nullify all the advantages enjoyed by the master, through the simple expedient of desisting from labour. Thus, concluded this erudite comment upon the principles of economics, property needed to be protected.¹³¹

This exhortation to the employers was far less effective than the despised new Combination Act and the unforeseen extraneous factor, the rapidly declining prosperity of the country. The Leeds Intelligencer was already gleefully reporting in October that the end of the cotton workers combination was imminent, "some fellows were taken up for 'molesting' ... the sense of hunger was the key to all others".¹³² The operatives of Bradford returned to their employers at the old rate rather than defy the magistrates and starve.¹³³ The conditions experienced by the workers in the manufacturing districts became increasingly severe. If the organs of the operative organizations had not been quelled in a district by the activities of the magistrate and master, the need for bread extinguished the few remaining flames of brotherhood. In its place, insurrection in the Luddite and Blanketeer image returned with all its old vigor. The clash

¹³¹Ibid., October 11, 1825.

¹³²Leeds Intelligencer; quoted by The Times, October 11, 1825.

¹³³Bradford Chronicle; quoted by The Times, November 8, 1825.

of rioters and militia became a familiar event in Britain. At Blackburn that blood was spilt¹³⁴ was not unexpected, even the government sponsored Blackburn Mail admitted that there were over 14,000 individuals starving in that city.¹³⁵ In Bolton the inhabitants lived in appalling misery, without food and clothing and "attacked by a disease of a particularly appalling nature".¹³⁶ The surrounding countryside was infested with twenty to thirty thousand weavers whose one aim was to destroy power looms.¹³⁷ Manchester became the centre of disorder in Lancashire and adopted the aspects of a theatre of war:

Yesterday the mob was very outrageous in the forenoon, so much so, that they entered several shops, took out provisions, demanded money and stripped people of decent appearance in the open street and robbed them of their money, watches etc....All the shops in Oldham Street, Ankers Street, Newton Street etc. were closed the whole of yesterday. We have the Cheshire cavalry here and a good supply of troops. In my opinion, if the mob should make a further stand against the military, they will fire upon them.¹³⁸

A letter, to the Editor of The Times, expressed the view that there would be a rebellion before Christmas, "they talk of 1773 and 1792 but they are nothing in comparison with 1826".¹³⁹

¹³⁴Blackburn Mail; quoted by The Times, April 26, 1826.

¹³⁵Ibid.; quoted by The Times, April 13, 1826.

¹³⁶The Times, May 1, 1826.

¹³⁷Leeds Intelligencer; quoted by The Times, April 30, 1826.

¹³⁸"A Manchester Letter", The Times, May 2, 1826.

¹³⁹"Letter to the Editor", The Times, July 20, 1826.

The poor man had, however, succumbed to hysteria. The riots of 1826 were a spontaneous reaction to specific distress and lacked even the modicum of leadership or purpose that the Luddites had claimed. That this was so must be attributed to the Act of 1825 which had effectively decapitated the labour movement and the fact that the oligarchical grip upon the administration of justice, the army and, indeed, all the trappings of authority was virtually unshakeable. That the Act was an effective instrument of class domination may be deduced from the careful analysis to which it was subjected by the Boston Chronicle. In the autumn of 1826 trade began to improve, and the worst distress of the operatives relieved. The Boston Chronicle realized that, with the pangs of hunger assuaged, the operatives might again resolve to combine; thus, the analysis was printed in a form no worker might mistake, a list of punishable offences:

1. Forcing or attempting to force any workman to depart from his hiring, before the end of the term for which he has been hired.
2. To return any work in an unfinished state.
3. Preventing or attempting to prevent any workmen from hiring himself or going to work.
4. Compelling or endeavouring to compel any person to belong to any club or union.
5. Or to contribute money, or to pay any fine to any club or union.
6. Or to pay any contribution or fine because he did not belong to any club or union.
7. Or because he did not comply with any rules or orders of any club or union.
8. Forcing or endeavouring to force any master to alter his mode of carrying on his business.
9. Forcing or endeavouring to force any master to limit the number of his apprentices.

10. Forcing or endeavouring to force any master to limit the number or description of his workmen.

Any man who shall by violence, threat, intimidation, molestation or obstruction do or endeavour to do any of these ten things, may be sent to a tread mill for any time not exceeding three months.¹⁴⁰

The Act was such as to erase any misconceptions as to the competence of the Tory government to maintain the oligarchy in power. Yet the government, for its part, had possessed sufficient intelligence to recognize the uselessness of a crushing reactionary policy and had carefully maintained the substance of class rule while making conciliatory, but virtually meaningless, gestures to placate public opinion. The economic situation while regrettable, had strengthened their position, and by the end of 1826, the operatives were as much under the dominion of their masters as they had ever been. Nevertheless, the Union movement with all its frustrations had not been in vain; recognition of the rights of the worker and of his class had been obtained; new leaders had emerged to assume the direction of his future development and, as The Times editor divined correctly, once the 'beast' had been aroused it would be hard to still.

¹⁴⁰ Boston Chronicle; quoted by The Times, November 24, 1826.

CHAPTER VI

A PATTERN FOR SETTLEMENT

Come lay your jarring discords by
And hail this happy day,
And mingle in sweet harmony
All ye that mingle may.

Theodore Hooke, Annus Mirabilis.

The Parliament of England, which Coleridge had disparagingly described as a 'Cyclops with one eye and that in the back of its head', had succeeded. The worker had been restored to subservience and the power of the oligarchy secured. By a manipulation of terms, the principle of freedom to tender labour for the highest possible price had been upheld, while its practical application had been denied. The extent to which concession and conciliation was necessary to prevent the 'march of revolution' had been reappraised and the conclusions embodied in the Combination Act of 1825. Thankfully, Huskisson rejoiced:

... public opinion (at least that portion of public

opinion which is worth having) is decidedly with us.¹ No doubt Huskisson meant "us" to refer to his fellow ministers specifically. Yet, it is not unlikely that the pronoun included a wider constituency, the entrenched propertied classes. The young unions, broken by the threat of law and the stagnation of trade, had been forced to bow to a Parliament whose own opinions had been modified by class interest. Nevertheless, the minister assumed that his measure was popular and used that assumption as a basis for future action.

The force of 'public' opinion had been experienced in the eighteenth century; a force the Administration immediately realized it needed to harness. However, in that era influential opinion emanated solely from the landed aristocracy, and was communicated through the medium of factions which had organized to promote individual interests. Controlled by these conditions, the preservation of a stable society seemed assured and, to a seasoned representative, only a struggle for the 'King's ear' constituted a major disturbance. Reform could be bruited without fear under this system; but only reforms which suggested slight changes were countenanced. Government was intended to remain in the hands of those "best fitted to rule."

The last troublesome decade of the eighteenth century, however, witnessed a new movement: a movement which

¹Huskisson to Granville, May 9, 1826, quoted by S. and B. Webb, 278.

incorporated general public opinion and organized agitation for a reform of the very framework of society. The rulers of the country were astonished; they had come to expect only desultory insurrection from the general public. Ordinarily, the propertied classes would have dealt summarily with such impudent aspirations. However, in this instance the circumstances were complicated by the dual revolution, a phenomenon which had rapidly swept the whole of Britain through a series of momentous changes. Despite these changed circumstances, the established orders preferred to react repressively, although a little more cautiously than usual. They ignored the cries of the people and chose to win the manufacturing interests of their side through measures designed to safeguard property.

One Act prepared for this purpose had been the General Combination Act of 1800. This measure was intended to check one result of the industrial revolution; one which seemed particularly dangerous. Unfortunately, the Act acquired a distinct class bias which, while unnoticed at the time, struck at the foundation of the workers liberties. The men of property were pleased with the success of their tactics; the danger of rebellion appeared to have been averted, and the dreaded French revolutionary principles eclipsed.

The Napoleonic Wars helped to create a revolution in the technique of government by forcing the cabinet to address itself exclusively to questions of national survival.

Domestic issues were relegated to a position of minor importance. Gradually, the terror of the 1790's was "forgotten" and movements of which the Luddite was an example, were dealt with confidently. Beneath the nation's united exterior, however, the unlovely features of class conflict were becoming visible. The operatives were rapidly developing a self-conscious awareness of the conditions under which they laboured: an activity which occurred partly as a result of the improving literacy rate and partly through a barely defined feeling of injustice. Class, therefore, became based upon social and cultural relationships and signified the awakening of a sense of identity. E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, suggests that this sense of identity became directed almost at once against their rulers and employers, culminating in a working class presence which was in 1832, "the most significant factor in British political life".

When, in 1815, the disruption of the economy forced the masses closer to starvation, the governors faced explosions of resentment which continually shook the country. The Administration reacted ferociously in the familiar manner of the 1790's and the sense of mastery promoted by victory in war. Repressive legislation and the militia dampened the appeals for justice. The Blanketeers, Spenceans and the victims of the Peterloo 'massacre' felt the power of the rulers of England. Nevertheless, even while persecuted, the

education and organization of the labourer continued virtually unimpaired. The Trade Unions, outlawed by the Act of 1800, became increasingly important in this regard. Although labouring under euphemistic terms to escape the penalties of society, the Unions slowly began to function more effectively and to provide a framework upon which the operatives could build.

The force of public opinion, swollen by the addition of numerous articulate workers, began to compel the attention of government. The alarm of the governors was deepened by the inadequacy of the machinery to maintain public order in the sprawling manufacturing towns. Fearing impotent isolation, the rulers were forced to grant a measure of respect to opinion other than their own. The newspaper, journal and pamphlet writers and editors received greater and more guarded treatment. The Constitutional Association was inaugurated in 1820 to help combat these purveyors of sedition. The rapid demise of the Association, almost by popular demand, plainly demonstrated the increasing weight attached to this phenomenon known as public opinion.

Within the halls of Parliament, the Whigs, at this time, were close to extinction as a party.² Nevertheless, they were individually active in attempting to gain the support of the country by adopting popular issues. Indeed,

²N. A. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, (Oxford: 1965), 137.

Woodward suggests that the greatest service rendered by the Whigs "lay in their view that concession to sustained popular demand was the wisest policy of the governing aristocracy".³ The motion for the disenfranchisement of Grampound and the reassignment of those two seats to the new town of Leeds was such a concession. The tying together of two principles, the reform of Parliament and the recognition of the manufacturing masses as a political factor, was too radical for the majority of the Lords and Commoners at Westminster. Nevertheless, it was an indication of a shift in parliamentary opinion. This shift should not be exaggerated, however. When in 1822 Russell introduced a measure of further reform, far less radical in substance, it was categorically rejected. The members of the Commons had no wish to be swamped, to have their power diluted, by the addition of one hundred new delegates even when they would be of their own choosing. Moreover, respect for the views of the general body of Englishmen did not include issues which touched upon the prerogatives of the landed gentry.

The economic condition of the country improved between 1822 and 1824. Into this situation the Tories, under their new and more liberal executive, wished to introduce far-reaching financial reforms. The very nature of their control of Parliament rested upon their ability to bend the

³Sir L. Woodward, The Age of Reform (2nd Ed., Oxford: 1962), 77.

House to their various measures. Thus, the spirit of conciliation and concession became transformed into a viable policy, so that all shades of opinion might be placated. At this juncture, the question of the repeal of the Combination Laws became an issue upon which the aristocratic rulers of the country could be reconciled. Francis Place, the tailor of Charing Cross, ably supported by his cohort in the Commons, Joseph Hume, had promoted such a repeal for many years. In this measure the cabinet believed it discerned a suitable instrument through which it might demonstrate its liberal spirit. As an added benefit, it was hoped that the repeal might also remedy a defect in the economic laws of England without releasing uncontrollable forces. In 1823-1824, the landed interest still did not believe that an adjustment in the control of labour would affect their vital interests in Parliament. The legalization of Trade Unions appeared to entail merely the recognition of a fait accompli; and, the various labour restrictions which few understood, were generally regarded to be unnecessarily harsh. Thus, the requisite Select Committee was appointed, and the Act moved through the numerous procedural stages in an aura of self-gratification. Without this tacit approval, all the herculean labours of Place would have been to no avail. Nevertheless, the Act passed in a form which produced unexpected results; a form largely dictated by the tailor and the conclusion of a succession of brilliant procedural mani-

pulations.

The swift radical reaction to repeal, wherein the operatives organized gigantic confederacies with regular constitutions and held meetings attended by delegates from a variety of trades, caused the average member of the House to fear for his prerogative of rule. The militant action of Union officials challenged the margin of profit of the master. Therefore, vocal opposition to the claims of labour multiplied. Thompson has suggested that an insurgent working class would force the creation of an alliance that had been hitherto prevented by certain antagonisms;⁴ one between the landed and manufacturing interests. The problems created by old versus new wealth, land versus factory, are latent in any expanding economy. However, these antagonisms were sustained by the paradox that the England of the 1820's, which was predominantly industrial, should be content with the electoral system of 1688; an electoral system based upon the divine right of the agricultural freeholder. The threat to order and authority posed by the workers in 1824-25 created a common bond, largely for the reasons suggested by Thompson. Class interest, wherein class and property were synonymous, had been thoroughly awakened by the recognition of the challenge presented by the unpropertied members of society. The dangers glimpsed during the flurry of combination convinced the ruling order that the power of numbers must be controlled.

⁴Thompson, 11.

Thus, the landed and manufacturing interests eagerly entered an alliance to ensure the preservation of that which they held most dear. The alliance, once contracted, was to prove irresistible.

The cabinet, attacked by influential opinion for overly liberal activity, reviled by the operatives who feared a re-enactment of the combination laws and subject to other innumerable pressures, was forced to re-examine its position. Nevertheless, they could not return to the conditions prior to repeal, the evident determination evinced by the operatives suggested that a popular rebellion might well be the consequence of such action. That this was a rather belated recognition of the lower orders as a separate group or class, even a power, in society was due largely to the recent addition of the moral force of knowledge to physical superiority; purpose had been provided for what had been an essentially aimless movement. Concession or conciliation could not, therefore, be abandoned, but the new factor of class interest demanded a new Act.

The Cabinet, acting for the nervous property holders, realized that their previous stand had been based upon false assumptions and shifted the emphasis of their interpretation of conciliation and concession. In 1825, they, therefore, initiated a policy of careful subjugation; subjugation designed to prevent a revolution based upon class interest. Nothing of party was involved in the new discussions, either in Par-

liament or in the committee room; the Whigs realized that to champion a cause which was detrimental to the aspirations of their class would constitute political suicide. Thus, while the conditions of industry and the liberal policies of the cabinet remained virtually unchanged, the social and cultural relationships between groups in society had hardened. The facts had not altered, but attitudes had.

The Act of 1825 embodied the new concepts and was deliberately structured to give the greatest possible licence to the landed interest, who would in turn extend their protection to the masters in industry. The secret of this stratagem, of course, lay in the unchallenged position the squirearchy held as the leaders of local communities and their status as landlords and justices of the peace. By utilizing these natural advantages, the propertied class managed to place itself in an unassailable position.

The role of Francis Place in this new system became relegated to that of advisor rather than the Fabian legend's appellation, 'decision maker'. The middle class Radicals

though born in the social sphere Place knew best, all too easily aped the Whigs and became assimilated into their ranks. The working-class Radicals wilfully refused to follow the principles Place set before them, and 'unaccountably' became disciples of Hodgskin. Nevertheless, while shorn of followers, Place remained a mine of information; in an age not too concerned with statistics he was a self-instructed directory

and gazetteer. In the era of 'combination repeal' he performed the function of catalyst and parliamentary lobbyist; a position which had assured the tailor's niche in early nineteenth century history.

Parliament, having acknowledged the changed situation and acted firmly, had established a useful precedent. The extremes of repression and ready concession had been tried and discarded; it was hoped that conciliation within the restrictions imposed by class interest might be conducive to greater social security. The cabinet demonstrated this new tactic in a letter to the Vicar and a Major Hawes of Dudley. These gentlemen wished to suppress a man named Cook's practice of exhibiting placards of a mischievous and inflammatory nature in his shop window. However Hobhouse replied:

Mr. Peel thinks that to make the papers in question the subject of public prosecution by the Crown would be to give them and their author too great importance and would probably do more harm than good ... [therefore] cause an indictment to be preferred against him as a private prosecution; against the expenses of which Mr. Peel will take care that you shall be indemnified.⁵

The Whigs indicated their sympathy with the efforts of the Administration, and the concern of both that the lower class be educated under oligarchical supervision, by the establishment of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge:

The political circumstances of the time (1826) had much influence in producing its formation. It could

⁵Hobhouse to the Vicar and Major Hawes of Dudley, May 24, 1826; quoted by Wickwar, 278.

not be otherwise at a time when the opinion that there was danger to religion and to the government in the spread of knowledge was avowed by many⁶

Huskisson had assessed the situation correctly with respect to public opinion; the central administrative body firmly controlled or was supported by, all segments of influential opinion. The lack of dissension or party feeling was clearly manifest in the ease with which Canning succeeded Liverpool in 1827. Only a partial reconstruction and a partial amalgamation with the Whigs was necessary. The central issue of politics had always been the divergent interests of the rich and not the welfare of the poor; Aydelotte's research into the 1841-47 period reveals that this trend was as entrenched then as in earlier years.⁷ Politics based upon such issues, however, become submerged when challenged by any movement from 'outside'. In 1829, Peel declared that he would not look to public opinion but to the Legislature;⁸ and Parliament passed Catholic Emancipation when it remains doubtful that the country would have done so. Grey used the obverse side of the tactic in 1831-32. The country appeared to carry the Reform Bill against Parliament. But, the measure was as much in character with the avowed pattern

⁶Address of the Committee of the S.D.U.K. (1845); quoted by S. and B. Webb, 51.

⁷W. O. Aydelotte, "Voting Patterns in the British House of Commons in the 1840's", Comparative Studies in Society and History, V (January, 1963), 157.

⁸Gash, Mr. Secretary Peel, 571.

set in 1825 as Peel's measure. Opinion had been heeded but not followed slavishly, and the class interest had been maintained. In this instance, it had seemed safer to extend the franchise to men in positions analogous to that of the landed interest but whose authority was channelled through the new urban communities of shop, factory and mill.⁹

The Combination Act of 1825 was the first major measure which established a pattern; a system of judicious concession in the face of a protracted assault upon entrenched privilege which would maintain the essence of 'class' rule while conceding the form. Through tactics such as these the aristocratic control of power endured unsullied in the nineteenth century.

⁹Cf. D.C. Moore, "Concession or Cure: The Sociological Premises of the First Reform Act", Historical Journal, IX (No. 1, 1966), 39-59.

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1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general

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APPENDIX A

The Resolutions pertaining to Combination submitted to The House on May 24th, 1825 by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Artisans and Machinery.

Parliamentary Papers (1824),
House of Commons, V, 609-610.

1.

That it appears, by the Evidence before the Committee, that Combinations of Workmen have taken place in England, Scotland and Ireland, often to a great extent, to raise and keep up their wages, to regulate the hours of working, and to impose restrictions on the Masters, respecting apprentices or others whom they might think proper to employ; and that at the time that the Evidence was taken Combinations were in existence, attended with Strikes and Suspension of Work; and that the Laws have not hitherto been effectual in preventing such Combinations.

2.

That serious breaches of the peace and acts of violence, with strikes of the workmen, often for very long periods, have taken place, in consequence of, and arising out of the Combination of Workmen; and been attended with loss to the masters and to the workmen, and with considerable injury and inconvenience to the community.

3.

That the masters have often combined and united to lower the

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rates of the workmen's wages, as well as to resist the demands for an increase, and to regulate their hours of working; and sometimes to discharge their workmen who would not assent to the conditions offered to them; which have been followed by suspension of work, riotous proceedings and acts of violence.

4.

That prosecutions have frequently been carried on, under the Statutes and the common law, against workmen, and many of them have suffered different periods for combining and conspiracy to raise their wages, or to resist their reduction, and to regulate their hours of working.

5.

That several instances have been stated to the Committee, of prosecutions against masters for combining for lower wages, and to regulate the hours of working; but no instance has been adduced of any masters having been punished for that offence.

6.

That the laws have not only been inefficient to prevent Combinations, either of masters or workmen; but, on the contrary have, in the opinion of many of both parties, had a tendency to produce mutual irritation and distrust, and to give a violent character to the Combinations, and to render them highly dangerous to the peace of the community.

7.

That it is the opinion of the Committee, that masters and

workmen should be freed from such restrictions, as regards the rate of wages and the hours of working and be left at perfect liberty to make such arrangements as they may mutually think proper.

8.

That therefore the Statute Laws that interfere in these particulars between masters and workmen, should be repealed; and also, that the common law under which a peaceable meeting of masters and workmen may be prosecuted as a conspiracy, should be altered.

9.

That the Committee regret to find from the evidence, that societies, legally enrolled as benefit societies, have been frequently made the cloak under which funds have been raised to the support of Combinations and Strikes, attended with acts of violence and Intimidation; and without recommending any specific course, they wish to call the attention of The House to the frequent perversions of these institutions from their avowed and legitimate objects.

10.

That the practice of settling disputes by Arbitration between masters and workmen, has been attended with good effects; and it is desireable that the laws which direct and regulate Arbitration should be consolidated, amended, and made applicable to all trades.

11.

That it is absolutely necessary, when repealing the Combin-

ation Laws, to enact such a law as may be efficiently, and by summary power, punish either workmen or masters, who by threats, intimidation or acts of violence, should interfere with the perfect freedom which ought to be allowed each party, of employing his labour or capital in the manner he may deem most advantageous.

APPENDIX B

Extracts from the Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the effects of the Act 5 GEO. IV, C. 95 in respect to the conduct of workmen, submitted to The House on June 16th, 1825.

Parliamentary Papers (1825),
House of Commons, IV, 501-510.

In order to enable themselves to form an opinion on the points referred to them, the first object of Your Committee was to ascertain the actual state of the Country in respect to Combinations existing among the working and manufacturing Classes; and for this purpose they inspected various communications which had been received, and were laid before them by His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home department, and the president of the Committee of trade. From these it appeared that, in almost every part of the United Kingdom in which large bodies of men are collected for the purpose of carrying on any craft or manufacture, Combination exists in a more or less objectionable form, and has been the subject of complaint and representation.

While the nature of these communications led Your Committee to believe, that some legislative measure might be expedient, the number and variety of them, as well as the advanced period of the Session, obviously precluded the hope of prosecuting and investigation into each particular instance: they have thought therefore, that they should best fulfil

the intentions of the House, by selecting a certain number from among the cases which had been laid before them, and endeavouring by their examination of these cases to collect the general character that belonged to the whole.

Among the cases they have examined are those of the Coopers, the Seamen in the Tyne and Wear, the Papermakers, the Shipwrights at Bristol, at Shields, and in the Thames; the Coachmakers in Dublin, the Workmen in some of the Collieries in Scotland. They have also inquired into the cases of the Cotton Spinners and the Trades in Ireland. In the latter instances, the Evidence has been chiefly received from persons who had become acquainted officially with the circumstances they stated. In these cases it appears either that the Associations had commenced since the passing of the Act of the last Session, or having previously existed had taken a more open and avowed character. That they vary considerably in extent, consisting in some instances of only a few hundred individuals, while in others they comprehend many thousands; -- that they are constituted with the utmost regularity, having their Presidents, Secretaries, Committees, and printed Regulations, by which they are ostensibly governed. The superintendence of the business of these Associations is generally assigned to a Committee periodically elected by the direction of which, they appear to be governed in their discussions with their masters, and in respect to the circumstances under which the labour of the whole body was to

be continued or withdrawn.

Some of the sets of Regulations under which these societies are constituted have been laid before Your Committee, and will be found in the Appendix to this Report. To these regulations Your Committee desire to direct the attention of the House, and particularly to those parts of them which mark the objects for which the societies are constituted, or for which they are contending, the powers exercised, the contribution collected, the fines imposed, and the degree in which individual liberty is sacrificed by those who become members of these and similar associations.

The different occupations in which the associating parties were employed, created necessarily a corresponding variety in the details of the several cases. These objects appear to be in most instances the regulation of wages combined with the assumption, in certain particulars, of a power of dictation in the conduct of the business in which they are engaged; the effect of which if submitted to, would be totally to subvert the independence of the masters, and deprive them of all means of resistance to the further demands of their workmen of whatever nature those demands might eventually be.

To illustrate this, Your Committee will shortly advert to what they have collected from the Evidence received by them, relative to the proceedings of some of the Associations which they have examined.

.....

The instances, above referred to, appear to Your Committee sufficient to convey the general character of the Association which have recently spread to so many parts of the United Kingdom, and embraced almost every branch of its industry. In referring to them, Your Committee have not thought it necessary to go into many points of detail, which will be found in the Evidence of the persons examined. It will be seen that in their general construction these societies are nearly similar; their objects, although in most cases concerned with the rise or maintenance of wages, usually extend to conditions affecting the conduct of the business or manufacture in which the members of the respective combinations are occupied, particularly the number and description of apprentices or persons to be engaged, and the exclusive employment of persons connected with the society. The resources on which they depend are derived from general contributions, form at once a bond of connexion, and supply powerful means carrying into effect their purposes by the application of them, to the support of such individuals, as, in maintaining the common cause against the masters, may be deprived of employment, and require assistance. As, in all contests carried on by a combination of the workmen, it is indispensable to success to deprive the masters of the power of substituting other workmen for those who may be dismissed or withdrawn from their service, every effort is necessarily directed to draw or retain as large a portion of workmen

within the circle of the combination as possible; to effect this, every art of seduction and persuasion, every application of threat, insult, intimidation and outrage, is, as circumstances require, put in practice. Nor is the co-operation of the associators confined to the particular crafts or trades in which they belong. Besides the Associations of workmen of each description amongst themselves, they are in Ireland united with other trades for the purpose of effecting their particular objects, by common means and mutual assistance; and it is alleged that this assistance has been afforded to produce intimidation, by the perpetration of the most atrocious outrages, in which the different associations become instruments to each other. This union was stated, in December last, to comprehend nineteen of the trades in Dublin, by one witness, and fifteen or sixteen by another, at the present period; some indication also of a union or a mutual understanding existing amongst some of the trades of London, will be found in the testimony given by Mr. Young.

... in the collection of funds, in the imposition of fines, in the attempts to limit the employment of apprentices, to regulate the conduct of manufacture as well as in the means used of extending their influence over workmen, and carrying on measures against the legitimate authority of the masters, is to be found in the opinion of Your Committee, the necessity of some further legislative provision, if not to check the progress of the Association, to confine its

operation to those objects alone which are essential to the protection of both the workman and the master, and may be secured without impairing the freedom of either, or endangering the public tranquillity.

As it has appeared to Your Committee, that for these purposes the provisions of the existing law are insufficient; their attention has been applied to the alterations which in consequence it became their duty to submit to the consideration of the House; -- with this view they have referred, not only to the provisions of the Act of 5th Geo. IV. but the Resolutions of the Committee which sat in the last Session, on which it was professedly founded, and they have the satisfaction of stating, that there is no alteration which they think it necessary to propose for restraining the system of Combination, in a manner consistent with the interests of all parties affected by it, which will not be found in strict conformity to the principle of those Resolutions.

.....

The alteration Your Committee propose, although not departing from what they believe to have been the intention of the Act of the last Session, so far pervade the whole of the remainder of it, that they think it expedient to recommend in the first instance, its total repeal, with a view of re-enacting such parts of it as it may be advisable to retain, and comprehending all that relates to Combination,

both in point of repeal and enactment in a single Act.

The effect of this repeal would be to restore the operation of the common law in those particular instances in which it is suspended by the second and third clauses of the Act. Your Committee, however, in recommending that the common law should be restored, are of opinion that an exception should be made to its operation, in favour of meetings and consultations amongst either the masters or the workmen, the object of which is peaceably to consult upon the rate of wages to be either given or received, and to agree to co-operate with each other in endeavouring to raise or lower it, or to settle the hours of labour; an exception, they trust, which while it gives to those in the different classes of masters and workmen the ample means of maintaining their respective interests, will not afford any support to the assumption of power or dictation in either party to the prejudice of the other, least of all that assumption of control on the part of the workmen in the conduct of any business or manufacture which is utterly incompatible with the necessary authority of the master, at whose risk, and by whose capital, it is to be carried on.

In recommending that liberty of associating and co-operating together, so far as wages or hours of labour are concerned should be preserved alike to masters and workmen, Your Committee feel it essential to the regard which is due to the free exercise of individual judgement, to propose

that the resolutions of any such association should be allowed to bind only parties actually present, or personally consenting; not to impose this limitation, would be to afford a dangerous opening to the operation of influence of the most pernicious kind, and by taking away the protection of that competition which arises out of the perfect freedom of individual action, destroy the best defence possessed by both the masters and the workmen, against the efforts of each other, in support of their conflicting pretensions and interests.

.....

Your Committee recommend that the most effectual security should be taken that legislative enactment can afford; that in becoming parties to any association, or subject to their authority, individuals should be left to act under the impulse of free will alone; and that those who wish to abstain from them, should be enabled to do so, and continue their service, or engage their industry, on whatever terms, or to whatever master they may choose, in perfect security against molestation, insult, or personal danger of what kind soever. To this Your Committee attach the highest importance, as being indispensibly necessary, not less to the real interests of the Working Classes, than to public peace.

Against much of the evil now so prevalent, a remedy will be found in the powers of the common law, but through

a slow and expensive process, by which the protective effect of it is liable to be in a great measure defeated; in conformity therefore, with the Act of last Session, Your Committee recommend for all offences of this description, mentioned in any Act to be brought in, a summary jurisdiction should be established, with a provision that would afford greater facility to its operation, by permitting conviction to take place on the oath of one credible witness, and by giving a larger discretion in respect to the punishment to be inflicted in case of conviction, to the extent of six months imprisonment, with or without hard labour, according to the circumstances of the case.

These are the alterations of the Law to which, on the best view they can take of the nature of the combinations now existing in the country, Your Committee think it expedient to confine their recommendations, in the hope that it may have the effect of restraining the operation of those Associations to the objects that they have above described. In doing this, however, they are most desirous that their impression of the importance of imposing such a restraint on the system of Combination as now pervades the Country, directed to purposes, as it appears in many instances, highly prejudicial, and supported by means, amongst which may be reckoned distribution of money, insult, intimidation, and the most atrocious crimes, should not be measured by the lenity with which they recommend it should in the first in-

stance be treated. The danger arising from it, unless cautiously restrained, appears to Your Committee to be of the most formidable character, and to affect equally the individual interests of those immediately concerned, the interests of the public, and the internal tranquillity of the Country. If the spirit of dictation now manifested be suffered to prevail among the working classes, if the application of capital is to be controlled, and the principle of free labour totally subverted, every part of the process of manufacture and trade subjected to the judgement of committees and every improvement by machinery or otherwise, admitted or rejected at their discretion; the necessary consequence must be, that capital will be withdrawn or transported, the source of every branch of our industry gradually cut off, and the whole labouring population of the country be consigned to the distress and misery, which it is the tendency of the ill-advised Combinations in which so great a proportion of it is implicated, rapidly and inevitably to produce it will become the duty of Parliament to look for effectual remedies, nor to cease till, by the successful application of them, the public protection is secured. Whatever those remedies may eventually be, whatever may be their effects upon any particular classes of the community, whether increased restraint on combination, or the relaxation of the laws by which our manufactures, ship building and other branches of domestic industry are protected from foreign competition, they must be

submitted to as the fruits of this pernicious system, and the necessary defence of the commerce and navigation, the capitalists and consumers of the country, against the dangers and privations to which they will be exposed. At this moment, the greatest part of the manufacturing labour of the kingdom may be said to be under the dominion of the committees of the respective Association, which are themselves under the influence of agitators, who dispose and govern it according to their will, deriving power and importance from the dissensions they forment, and after subverting the natural relation between the employers and the employed, are rashly urging the destruction of trade itself, reckless of the individual misery, the crimes, the public calamities with which it must be attended. If, however, on the one hand, Your Committee cannot but anticipate the fatal results the working classes are bringing upon themselves, by a perseverance of the course in which they are engaged, on the other, they derive hope from their confidence in the good sense and good disposition of by far the greatest proportion of those who, mistaking their own interest, and misapprehending the intentions of the law of the last Session, are now enrolled amongst the members of these Combinations. They are sanguine in believing, although perhaps under momentary delusion or intimidation, their good sense and their good disposition will prevail, and they require only to understand their danger to seek the means of avoiding it. The recommendations

contained in this Report, if carried into effect by the Legislature, and firmly executed by the magistracy, will, as Your Committee trust, afford those means, by giving protection to those who wish to emancipate themselves from any association into which they have been reluctantly forced, or in which they are involuntarily retained. By availing themselves of these, they will not only recover the exercise of their own free will, in disposing of their labour to the persons, and on the terms they find most advantageous, but at the same time restore to the various branches of our national industry that liberty by which they have so long flourished, equally to the advantage of every class dependent upon them, and to the strength, the security, and happiness of the Empire.

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